



# STRAIGHT AS A LINE

BY ALLAN A. MAG-INNES



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STRAIGHT AS A LINE





# STRAIGHT AS A LINE

**An Australian Sporting Story**

BY

ALLAN A. MACINNES

LONDON

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# STRAIGHT AS A LINE



## CHAPTER I

### TOWARDS THE WEST

A CRISP, beautiful March morning, and the clear sun shines brightly on the iron roofs of the thriving town of The Grange, in the Western District of Victoria. As yet the shutters are up on the windows of all the places of business, but their doors are already open, and through them are seen the white-sleeved arms of the shop-boys, as, with broom in hand, they prepare the well-worn pine floors for the dainty feet and trailing silks that will grace them during the day.

The doors of the Royal Hotel—a comfortable, solid-looking, two-storied, blue-stone building, standing at the intersection of the main streets, of which there are two, running at right angles with each other—are also open, and already passengers by the outgoing coach to Westerton are seen, overcoat on arm, sauntering leisurely up and down the clean flagstoned pavement, to pass the time till the Royal Mail-coach shall clatter out of the stable-yard, or standing close to the piled-up luggage by the outer door of the hotel, puffing smoke from pipe or cigar, after the manner of men who have had a good breakfast, and enjoyed it. One of the most striking amongst the former is a tall, straight, fair-haired colonial, close

shaven save his flaxen-coloured, lengthy moustache. He is of an athletic, manly build, carrying no spare flesh, but wiry and muscular withal. A warmer sun than that beating on the white roofs of the town this morning has put its sign-manual on his hands and the lower portion of his face, for no drone in the hive of human workers is Fred Melville, of Rosebrook Station, Western District of Victoria, and Lake Melville Cattle Station, Northern Queensland, from which place he is now returning to visit the dear old home, on the banks of the Glenavon River, where his merry boyhood had been spent.

It is now five years since Fred went up North, with all the ardour of a bush-loving colonial, to face the difficulties and dangers attendant on the opening up of new country in the land of the myall black, leaving his elder brother, George, a steady, straight-going man, honoured by all who knew him, in charge of the ancestral possessions. Since long ago, when the pitiless waters of the Southern Sea closed over, when the *Admella* went down, the revered grey head of his father, Vivian Melville, who had pioneered the country, and taken up the Rosebrook Station, formed its orchards and gardens, founded the well-known Rosebrook flock of merino sheep after careful selection from the New South Wales Camden flocks, which were of the truest type and purest blood; imported the thoroughbred horses, Middleton and Touchstone, which have made such a hit as successful sires in the Western District, leaving the marks of their lineage on the Star and Snip Steeplechases, and white-stockinged, racing chestnuts that were so successful on the turf,—George has been the manager of the property, assisted in advice by his aged mother, who had been a loving companion to her husband in the lonely bush of the early days, taking an interest in all the station occupations, although educated and refined, a fine

horsewoman and yet a housekeeper in every sense of the word. There is no cleaner or better kept homestead in the Western District now. There you have the best of home-made preserves on the clean bright shelves of the pantry, the thickest cream, and the best butter in the scrupulously kept dairy, and in the kitchen the tables, shelves, and pine floor are kept as bright as they can be made. The drawing- and dining-rooms are marvels of taste in neat furniture and carpets, and the walls are adorned with well-chosen pictures and neatly painted plaques. Still in the dining-room is to be traced the bent of the late owner's inclinations; for there, near together, are splendidly executed oil-paintings of Mr. Melville's two favourites. The dark brown, with coat burnished to red gold, is the Middleton gelding, Tramp, the hero of many a tough contest over the hurdles, under the rose-and-black-striped jacket of his then owner. The horse's white-rimmed, life-like eyes gleaming, while the game head is turned, as the sharp, forward-thrown ears indicate, in the direction of the door, as if in answer to the greeting of a friend, is wonderfully done, as is also the muscular contour of the tireless brown. The other horse, almost snow white, blood-like from the tips of his small Arab-like ears, over-broad nostril, long sloping shoulder, and wiry muscular quarters, to the clean flinty hoofs, is Happy Jack, still often lovingly spoken of by old-time race-goers as the cleverest and fastest jumper over big fences ever seen in that part, though some brilliant animals of his class have been bred on the fertile and well-grassed acres of the Western District. There, too, are paintings of the English cracks, Gladiateur, Saunterer, and Merry Monarch, to be seen; while in a conspicuous position hangs a large picture, by Herring, entitled "Steeple-chase Cracks," where you have the field, arrayed in divers coloured racing jackets, in the full swing of a race across country, in every conceivable position



that horses can take in the excitement of a race over fences, and the whole is replete with life. One painting by the artist whose brushes have depicted to the life the racehorses, Happy Jack and Tramp, is entitled "The Last Fence." Neck and neck, Modesty and Ingleside are landing over a stiff three-railer at the entrance to the straight run, while, both capless, and with jacket and cord stained and spattered with clay, hands low on the withers, and faces firm set, are the crack amateur riders, Lindsay Gordon and R. Learmouth, side by side. Modesty's rider has lost his stirrup, but the long, lithe limb clasps closely to the clear-cut flank, just lightly marked with a crimson stain. It is a splendid picture, and one looking at it waits almost unwittingly for the steel-shod hoofs to hit upon the greensward, and for a sight of the desperate battle that will be waged up the crowd-lined straight to the white winning post. There is the trace of a master hand in the determined gleam in the eyes of the horses, in the pose of their flattened ears and glint of the flaring red nostrils. Yet another picture by the same hand is entitled "*There shall be There no Night.*" A beauteous female figure is depicted, clothed in light, emerging from a black silver-edged cloud, which is flung backwards as a discarded cloak, with one arm reaching up towards the opening in the cloud, whence issues the light of everlasting day, while the other appears as if it had just thrown back the vestment of darkness. The picture interpreted would mean that "*There is no Night There,*" for at the intercession of the wearied ones, who are no longer faint, to whom Night had come as a gentle mother in the old sad days, bringing them balm and nepenthe in the blessing of sleep, He hath bidden her cast off the garb of sorrow, and given in its stead the radiant vestments of day, that she may enter the heavenly portals, her earthly mission accomplished. But, ah! ever close upon the creating brain and hand of genius

waits the outstretched arm of Death, ever ready to seize the upward mounting hands that are fain to lift the veil from the unseen. Ay! full often when the foot is on the topmost pinnacle of the mountain of fame, from whose summit are outspread before the enchanted eye all the fair things that the earth has to offer, and a glimpse even of the glories of heaven, it closes down upon the aspiring hands ere the view is complete, and draws over the eyes a veil, beyond which none may see, perhaps to free the soul from its bondage of clay, that it may traverse regions unknown to that which is of the earth, earthy; and so the brushes of the artist are still, and the fingers that lovingly held them were long ago folded to rest.

But this is a long digression from Fred Melville, who puffs at his cigar, glad to feel the incense of a good weed again in his nostrils, as he walks to and fro on the pavement before the main entrance of the hotel, till resounds the crack of a whip, and the rumble of heavy wheels in the stableyard is followed by the appearance of a gaily painted, heavy india-rubber sprung, four-wheeled Cobb & Co.'s coach, drawn by a handsome team of greys. Seated on the box is Jim Hall, a steady, splendid whip, and, for all his grey hairs, as good a hand with the "ribbons" yet as ever sat on a box seat, otherwise he had not for so many years done faithful service for Cobb & Co. "Good-morning, Jim!" and as the coach horses pull up before the door at the firm-spoken, lingering "Whoa!" of the driver, his keen grey eyes travel over the tanned face of the speaker, and the next instant a strong, muscular hand is extended with the greeting, "Mr. Fr  d, by Jove!" and the grim features relax into a pleasant smile, as a sinewy, strong hand encircles his. They have been comrades on the box seat in many a drive in the good old days, these two, when Fred, then finishing his education at the Academy, slipped down by the coach on Saturday

mornings for a Sunday at home, and many a good lesson he then gained in the management of an unruly team, which had not been forgotten in after-life, from the master hand. It is now one of the pleasures of his return to civilization to sit beside Jim Hall again, with a prospect of a pleasant drive before him, made still more enjoyable from the many reminiscences that are sure to recur as the well-conditioned team rattle along the metalled road still so familiar, limned as it was on the memory to every turn in those old days. A gentle exhortation from the driver, when all passengers and luggage are aboard, and rapidly the leaders, breasting their collars, wheel round and away down the street, past the line of shops on either side, now open for the day, and between the flagstoned footpaths, on which a few early birds are already wending hither and thither with hurrying feet, now stopping for a second to exchange a greeting with a friend, or passing onward with or without a nod of recognition, for all the world like a little string of ants pursuing their avocations. Further on, and the coach whirls past farmers' carts, laden with produce, where, in many cases, beside the "guid man" rides his better-half, who will presently dispose of baskets of butter and eggs to the small store-keepers and produce-dealers. Jogging along at a more rapid rate arrive the German waggons, also on the same errand. Soon the outskirts of the town are passed, and the wider fields come into view. There, on the right, marked by long, white-painted poles, is the racecourse, and yonder stand the grim, grey posts and rails that, as poor Gordon says,

"With impunity may not be broken."


Fred, casting his eye across, notes the changes that have taken place since his time. The old wooden grand-stand has given place to an elegant brick edi-

fice, capable of containing all the beauty of the district, with their chaperones and admirers, whilst on the sloping lawn gleam the crimson and white of flowers. The smoke curls lazily away from the cigar as Fred's reverie becomes deeper. He is thinking of a day long past, when yonder grounds were peopled with a gay concourse of sightseers in holiday attire,— of

“The stand thronged with faces, the broadcloth and laces,  
The booths, and the tents, and the cars,  
The bookmakers' jargon, for odds making bargain.”

Nor did he forget their cigars, the *sine quâ non* of the professional bookmaker, who has not time for the slow process of filling the pipe in the short intervals between the races. There it was he took his first seat in a big race, when the Amateur Hurdles were run, and the best horseman in the West sat in the saddle. As if it were only yesterday he can hear the bustle in the paddock, the hurry of gentleman riders anxious for “seven pounds more weight,” “the loan of a lighter saddle,” or the whereabouts of the sheeted steed that will in a few minutes be cantering gaily down the straight, “the cynosure of a thousand eyes.” Fred Melville can feel himself lifted on to the shapely back of the good leap-year mare, The Blonde, one of their own breeding, by his brother George, and hears his brother's calm injunction as he takes up the off-leather a hole : “A steady strain on the bridle, Fred, and come from the turn.” He hears, too, a pitiful appeal to George, in these words : “George, old man, do ride old Rory for me ; I can't get within a stone of 12-4, though I've borrowed all the spare weights on the ground.” “Sorry, Don, to refuse ; I'm not riding to-day.” Then, as Fred turns the mare's head to walk her down the straight, prior to a smart preliminary, he hears a sweet voice speaking from one of the adjacent carriages, saying, “Oh, Jimmy, I have drawn your

horse, Rory O'More, in this sweep. I do hope he may win," and then The Blonde treads upon the level green straight run between the lines of spectators. The starting post is on the far side of the course, and as the horses are being marshalled into line, the bony figure of old Rory O'More, cantering across the flat, is visible, the well-known figure of his brother sitting still in the saddle, and he knows that, although gold would not have drawn him into doing battle against his own good little chestnut mare, George has entered the lists for the sake of a "winsome lady." There is one plunging false start, then the horses, prancing, come up together, and away they go, the mare well in the van of the battle, taking the first flight of hurdles with scarcely a rap, though, back in the ruck, old Rory rattles them to an awkward tune. Past the stand they flit amid merry cheers and waving of handkerchiefs, scarcely deigning to pause at the hurdles, for the quality of the field is undeniable. At the back of the course, Mystic and Marksman—the favourites—go to the front, and Fred can see by the application of their riders' heels that they are being ridden, although yet far from the winning post, so safe do the riders feel that only the two are in it. The strain that has broken the resolution of many a good horseman is telling upon The Blonde's rider, and, feeling that his mount is equal to the task, he touches her with the spur, and as the muscular quarters of the mare seem to cringe beneath her at every stride, he knows that he is gaining upon the leaders, and as they draw their whips the mare also gets a stinging cut that brings her alongside, and the race seems to lie between the three. Half a neck in advance the mare leads at the last hurdle, and clouting hard all three get over and renew the struggle up the straight run. The pace has told its tale, for strides are shortening, and the struggling horses seem to roll against each other. There is a babel of voices shout-



ing words of encouragement to the riders, a vision of waving arms and waving hats, which grows denser as the white post appears. The mare is a head in front, and doing her utmost, though dead beat. Suddenly two whip cracks resound on the right, and a blue jacket flashes up as old Rory wins on the post by a neck, thanks to good horsemanship.

"That was a close finish, Mr. Fred, when old Rory O'More got home in the Amateur Hurdles with Mr. Melville up."

"I was just thinking of that, my first big race, Jim, and I am free to admit that that lesson was not thrown away, hard as it seemed to have to learn it then."

"I'll not forget your remark to him, spoken in the shadow of defeat, nor his reply—words spoken as old Ned and myself put her rugs on the mare."

"It is equally present with me, Jim. I remember saying, 'Here we have been training this mare for the last three months for this particular race, and you go and ride and beat her on that old screw.'

"'Pardon me, Fred, but you let the mare go much too soon, and came back to us in the last quarter as I expected you would.'

"He was quite right. That race has been a warning to me never to come away from the field till certain that the other horses are beaten."

"Poor old Rory! Jimmy Don had bought him in Melbourne for a tenner, and trained him for that event himself. It was the horse's last appearance on the turf, and he crowned his career with a gallant win."

"Does my brother still sport silk across country, Jim?"

"Seldom now, though he regularly, as you perhaps know, hunts the Westerton pack on Freetrader or The Bard. But they say the latter has broken down, and he is now riding a bad-tempered black, called Thunderbolt, a great fencer, I believe. He won the Lady's

Bracelet here, last races, for Miss Dunsmere, on Sarchedon, and his finish was as workmanlike as ever."

And so, as onward ran the wheels, the discourse was leavened with legends of the horse and his rider, tales so dear to the listening ears of the average Australian. The off-leader in the team was old Nonsuch, a noted steeplechaser, and the near-sider, an upstanding grey, was voted good enough for a spin between the flags. When two men, good judges of the equine race, who have ridden their rides, meet together and fall to talking of mutual racing favourites, as these two did, time and space flit rapidly by, and in the charmed circle of racing lore, is frequently found that touch of nature which makes the world, of sporting men at any rate, kin. Then there was the country to talk about, and the changes that had taken place in the last few years. On the right, where the country is undulating, and the small hills are crowned with the sighing sheoak, is now seen the homestead of The Gums station, at one time the abode of the Camerons, very early settlers, who have retired to Toorak, but now the property of Mr. Dunsmere, an English gentleman resident there with his only unmarried daughter. A glimpse of the dwelling can only be obtained here and there from the roadway, surrounded as it is by beautiful blue gum trees and densely foliaged evergreens, making the place look so cosy and comfortable, an ideal country residence.

"Miss Dunsmere and her father usually ride down here to meet me for their mail-bag," says the driver. "He is a grand old horseman, one of the straight-goers to hounds in the Leicestershire Vales, they say, and still sits his horse in a manner that is pleasant to see. Miss Dunsmere also has the family seat on horseback, if one might call it so, and for all her slight figure and gentle ways is a splendid equestrian. No fence is too big for either when out with the hounds,

although the old gentleman tires quickly and does not now go from the find to the finish. Heavens! here they come now!" ejaculates Hall; and, sure enough, across a grass-covered paddock, in a line parallel to the station track, there comes a lady on horseback at full gallop, while on the roadway, at a furious pace, rides an old gentleman on a stout cob. His face is turned towards the lady as he calls out some hurried directions. At one glance the pair on the box seat come to the same conclusion; namely, that the lady's horse has got beyond her control, and means mischief. Instantly the driver reins up his team and awaits the issue. Though some distance away, it is evident that a strong, three-rail fence stretches in front of the runaway horse, and another small paddock is to be crossed before the main road is reached, where the coach stands. With lowered head, that defies all attempts of the light hands to control, comes the big roan at the timber, as straight as an arrow. Does he see it? and will he rise at it? are the thoughts that shape themselves in the minds of the observers as they eagerly watch the runaway. Sitting well backwards, and with hands held low, the rider sits still as a rock. In a few strides the horse reaches the first obstacle, and momentarily crouching on his haunches takes it "like a bird," and settles down to his terrible stride again, while from a distance can be heard the strong voice of the courageous old father, "Pull on the snaffle, Nell, and turn him for the hill." The advice is good, but even the muscular arm of a strong man would fail to check such a horse when he meant going. They are now close to the second obstacle, a carefully trimmed, dense, prickly box-hedge, and again the pair flit over with scarcely a rap. It is a most exciting gallop, as straight for the coach horses comes the runaway stead. The onlookers can now see the fair face of his rider, her long golden hair streaming loosely from her uncovered head, her white



wrists still straining at the thin reins of the light bridle. They can see also the flattened ears laid back on the round muscular neck, the white-fringed eyes, and the wide-spread, scarlet nostrils, gleaming over the row of white teeth, holding steel of the bit, of the maddened horse. The fence bordering the road is of four rails, massively built to prevent the inroads of vagrant or travelling cattle. It is a fence that would be taken with extreme caution by the boldest horseman, and one that would mark the animal equal to the task of getting safely over it as fitted for any hunter's trial in the colony. Evidently the big roan regards it as merely an ordinary hurdle, judging from his pace. Suddenly, while yet a couple of lengths from the obstacle, his ears shift ; he has noticed the coach horses, and as a result changes his pace, and sliding up almost under the bottom rail, bucks over like a deer. It was a most awkward jump, and would have loosened the grip on the pigskin of the strongest rider. The lady, tired with long exertion in her endeavours to restrain her 'streperous steed, shifts slightly in the saddle, and before she can recover, the bank of the gutter, on the landing side, has broken away under the fore feet of the horse, and both come down a heavy fall. Fred Melville, accustomed to the eccentricities of jumping horses, is down from the coach in an instant, and as the horse struggles to his feet he has him in a strong grip by the bit, while his left hand closes firmly on a sharp-pointed, quivering ear. A determined "Stand, you brute !" and other exhortations in a steady voice help to allay the nervous fear of the horse ; but the position of the rider is still one of extreme danger, for, evidently stunned by the fall, she makes no effort to rise from the ground, her habit being caught on the horn of the saddle. Could that blood-shot, white-rimmed eye of the horse have seen, through the coat-sleeve that pressed down so closely on it, the form hanging at his side, not man's puny

strength would have availed to prevent the terrible lunges that these powerful, muscular quarters, with their terminous armoury of flint-like hoofs, would have made at the unconscious burden. Fred, thoroughly roused to the exercise of all his strength by the excitement of the moment, would have put a grip on the red nostrils that would have choked the horse down, though he himself might have been battered to pieces in the tussle, rather than allow the frail girl to be stricken. The cob quickly arrived on the scene, and his rider, quickly coming to Melville's assistance, unloosed the girths, and, as the saddle came off, the lady was free. Giving the horse's reins to a by-standing passenger, Fred drew out his travelling flask and handed it to Mr. Dunsmere, who forced a sip between the closed lips of his daughter, assisted by a lady passenger from the body of the coach, who gently and kindly, as if accustomed to bush accidents, undid the white high collar, and chafed the white wrists of the unconscious girl. There is already a dark bruise on her fair forehead, but breath returns, and she is placed in the coach and quickly conveyed to the station. Her Majesty's mails admit of no delay *en route*, so the fair burden having been carefully taken inside from the coach, Hall turns his leaders round and once more is about to take the road, when Mr. Dunsmere returns.

"Thank you, sir, sincerely, for your courageous conduct in dealing with that animal. But for your prompt action I fear that my daughter would never have looked upon God's earth again. She has now revived. Pardon me for saying so little, for I must return to her side. May I ask your name?"

"Melville, sir. Fred Melville."

"Ah, then, I have heard of you many a time from your respected mother, our neighbour, who is daily expecting you. Remember to make yourself at home here always, Melville. Miss Dunsmere, I am sure,

will shortly hope to see you in order that she may thank you for your most timely assistance ;" and clasping the young man's hand warmly, he said "Good-bye."

The remainder of the drive passed rapidly. As the long four-in-hand lash whistled through the air, the good team settled down to their twelve miles an hour gait, and quickly made up for lost time.

## CHAPTER II

### CONCERNING GREEN PASTURES

OF all the colonies, to the Victorian born, no matter where he may wander, there is no place like dear old Victoria ; and to him who knows the lay of the land, the pick of all the country is the Western District thereof. The weary sojourner in the arid regions of the far North, during the long days when Death uses drought as his sickle, and the cattle perish in thousands around and in the mud of what was once a waterhole,—when the good game stock-horses succumb, one by one, to the fierce heat which withers all the grasses, in days when the fiery north wind, blown as if from furnaces of molten silver, whirls away even the remnant of last year's dry stubble ; and in the nights of almost unendurable heat,—has his mind oft-times soothed by the remembrance of its green fields and fertile valleys, its clear springs of ever-running water, its deep, cool rivers and umbrageous trees, its calm summer nights, and clear, bright, sunny days. There the cattle seem to the memory to have been always in good condition, and the horses gay and powerful, when fed even on the natural grasses alone.

When, perhaps, sitting on the end of a log, near some almost dried up, slimy waterhole, the sun beating down with intolerable heat, and the sand-flies worrying one with their insatiate thirst for his blood, with a soil grey and sere beneath him, on which not

a sign of grass is visible, only a grey bleached earth throwing back the heat rays, then the wanderer longs for his southern home, and even the thought of its comforts, as the fancy flies from the present to the happy past, can lighten the burden that is heavy to bear.

Many a time had Fred Melville thought thusly, when working hard out back in the endeavour to get his new country in order ; and now, when that had been done, what a genuine pleasure it was for him, straight out from that arid region, to set foot in the veritable enchanted regions wherein his old home was situated. It was pleasant to think of the golden-coned honeysuckles, from which emanated such a pleasant perfume at eventide, where from tree to tree whirred flights of whistling parrots—the blue mountain, paroquet, and red lowrie—with joyful notes. There too, on the river frontage further down, spread the wild heathfields, covered with green gorse, and glittering with many rare perfumed flowers, the gayest of which was the crimson heatherbell.

What a pleasure it used to be in the old days to mount old Alfred or The Dingo, and with the kangaroo dogs, Rainbow and Rover, following closely, to put up an old-man kangaroo, and give hard chase across the springy, scented flats. There was no riding for the finish in those days ! The racing was terribly in earnest, from the leaping forth of the quarry till the end of the run, extending perhaps two or three miles. If a fence came in the way, as often happened, there was no necessity for shutting off steam ; the good horses aforesaid knew the ways of the birds, and as descendants of the good old Defence hunting strain, kept up, as well as such horses could, the former glory of the blood.

The Rosebrook homestead is situated on a rising eminence, having a gentle slope to the tree-bordered, tortuous Glenavon River. Like all, or nearly all,

Western homesteads, the building is low, with wide, honeysuckle-shaded verandahs, ensconced snugly amid groves of shrubs, and laurel, cypress, and acacia trees. Here and there are vine-covered trellises, in the season laden with grape clusters, reminding one of the heavy burden of Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. On each side of the gravelled pathway leading to the main entrance are flower plots, which loving fingers tend ; and such is the result, that at all seasons of the year bloom is there to be found. Roses of all shades, beautiful and fragrant, are visible there now ; and in their season will appear phlox, petunia, eschscholtzia, violets, daisies, daphnes, lilies of the valley, and divers and rare specimens of chrysanthemum, so beautiful in the early winter months. Encircled by a carriage drive from the lower gates is the orchard, where grow, as they have done for years, large trees of apple, pear, peach, plum, mulberry, cherry, etc., yielding their fruits in due season. Beneath their shades, on the rich black soil, are beds of strawberries, that in spring time are laden with leaf-hidden fruit, as visitors can testify. Many a town belle, after spending a short holiday at Rosebrook Station, in the days when Miss Melville (since happily married to a sea captain) was at home, speaks still in glowing terms of its many delights ; nor does she forget its strawberries and cream, so rich flavoured, and has longed for the time to come when she might steal away again to the Western District for the glorious fresh air of its mornings, and its noonday shades ; for the merry gallops to the township in the late afternoons for the mails, on sleek, gentle, free, eager horses, that are so well bred and so well broken. Often in some crowded ball-room, in the height of the town season, the memory of more than one beautiful dame still strays to that far verandah, where the moonbeams, stealing through the interstices between the vine leaves, made a lattice-

work of light on the floor, out to which the music stealing through the wide-open doors of the bright, lamp-lit drawing-room told the measure for the same graceful feet to keep time to the strains of some dreamy waltz, on the arm of one of the stalwart, toil-hardened, athletic brothers, and their gentle laughter now at some well-remembered jest then spoken, is very nearly akin to tears for the sake of "auld lang syne."

To such a homestead the rumbling wheels and quick hoof-strokes approached, and the white gravel of the well-kept drive flew like hail from the glittering shoes of the horses.

Standing on the pathway, amid the flowers, is an aged lady, of sweet expression of face, her white hair gathered over her shapely head. One hand holds a cluster of beautiful roses, while the other adjusts the *pince-nez*, that will show to her failing eyes the object for which the mail-coach has come up the drive—an unusual occurrence, excepting when some visitor is arriving unannounced.

"Good-day, James! You have something for me?" and as Hall says, "Yes, madame, I have," the bronzed backblocker descends from the box, and stands before his aged mother. One glance at the stalwart form, and her arms are thrown around his neck.

"My son! surely my son!"

Yes! To a mother the wildest and roughest of us is still only the wilful, loved boy that was always in trouble, yet ever sure of forgiveness; and often the spirit that is most dauntless to subdue in the battle of life, that urges the fist to strike in the hasty encounter, and the courage that faces all dangers in the field when far from home, goes with a tender heart that is gentle and kind to her that bare him, for sake of the kind words, the heart-spoken forgiveness, and the honourable instruction taught in boyhood's days.

Ah! could this mother have seen the murderous myall blacks stealing up to the sleeping camp in the far bush while it was yet night—seen, too, the hardwood spears beating up the ashes of the smouldering camp fire, or heard the cracking revolvers, that flashed forth, as an awakened pair fought for life, shooting straight, as they had learned to do in the sports of the fields near the dear old home, she would have known the reason why her rest was so often disturbed with boding dreams of her white-haired boy. Could she have seen him, weakened from loss of blood, staggering beside the horse that bore his comrade back towards the main camp, yet holding the swaying figure of his close friend, the game little Jimmy Don, who would have done anything for him, wounded almost unto death by a long, sharp-pointed spear, her hand would have remained on his head still longer, and her soul would have gone up to God with a prayer of thanks for the courage and devotedness of her wandering boy.

He, too, might think of a dear white head, bowed in supplication, on that night when the moon was hidden by sullen, leaden rain-clouds, and the white water-sheet gleamed through the darkness as far as the eye could see, when the swirl of the current swept the game stock-horse down the stream, amid the boles of the trees, along with the resistless driftwood and swirling foam; when he found himself alone, battling with the surge, the good game horse having gone down beneath him—almost worn out in the struggle for life, when the current tore away his arm-clasp from the slippery tree-trunk, and wrestled with him, as it seemed, in pure glee at having one of those human beings, usually so proud of their attainments, at its mercy. Sinew and muscle, that had been tried and tested in manly sports, that had been trained in swimming and diving in the sandy depths of the Glenavon River, were too stubborn not to fight to the



last ; and for sake of this dear old remembered face, bowed in nightly prayer, perchance, struggled again and again for life, till the shallows were reached at last. These things had been done and done with in the new land ; but it would only have caused grief at home to have narrated such adventures, and so they were as yet untold. Only the pleasures of the life at Lake Melville were descanted on, with stories of its rich pastures, and fattening stock, and the rest, only read between the lines by the elder brother, who knew the hardships attendant on the settlement of new country.

After the greeting, and a home chat, with which we have nothing to do, held in the old dining-room so familiar to Fred, where each old picture seemed to have something new to disclose, he strolled out towards the stables, a long, comfortable-looking range of buildings not far from the homestead. The clean white sand near the doorways, and the well-kept air of the establishment ; the large, well-thatched haystacks near at hand ; the blood-like heads of the horses, uplifted to scan the stranger passing by ; the small rich rye-grass paddocks, give one a fair idea in which direction the bent of the owner's inclination lays.

A hoof-stroke on the well-beaten path, and a quick-spoken " Here, Ted ! " that brings the groom out of the saddle-room, with a couple of bright stirrup-irons in his hand, introduces us to the senior partner and manager of the firm of Melville Bros. One glance at both, and you could swear to the relationship of the men. George, the elder, is fair, with a ruddier tinge in his moustache and close-cropped hair, barely as tall as Fred, but broader in the shoulders, having the same easy carriage and athletic gait as his brother.

One long, searching glance as they approach each other, and then each smiles, as the words " Fred ! " and " George ! " are spoken ; but the manly look fair in the

face, and the strong hand-grip, "like the clasp of an only brother," tells each that the other may be reckoned upon in time of trial to stand shoulder to shoulder in defence of his brother's honour. There will be a late night that night, and the tobacco cloud that fills George's sanctum will quiver at their laughter, as over the fire stories are exchanged that have been kept for each other's benefit.

An old chum, much like the other two in appearance, but with fair, flowing beard, the Rev. James Mostyn, now clergyman in the township of Westerton, hearing of his old friend's arrival by coach, hurried over, and the three men live the old life over, or are entertained with stories of the new land in the far-away North.

James Mostyn is himself a clergyman's son. His father had been educated for the Church, but coming to Australia in the early days, had gone in for pastoral pursuits, taking up a station ; but still on the Sundays, and, indeed, at any favourable opportunity, he did not neglect to say a word for his Master. He was honoured and respected by all for his liberality and attention to the poor and needy, and his sermons, with their accompanying illustrations, were attentively listened to in the bush buildings that did duty for churches in those days. Mostyn was no snivelling hypocrite, but a man who acted up to his convictions, and one whom it would have been dangerous to insult.

Jim, inheriting from his father and mother a reverence for things divine, had always been a thoughtful, studious lad at school, gaining high classical and mathematical honours, and, from his own inclination, had studied for the Church. When the fit took him, he had showed on the college green his prowess with the cricket bat ; and, as an athlete, he had twice carried off the college cup.

The Melvilles and Mostyns, as early settlers, had been neighbours for many years ; and when Jim

Mostyn's mother died, he was to be found more often at Rosebrook than at home, his elder brothers doing all the station management, so that between the three lads a strong friendship sprang up, that was cemented as they grew.

Like most colonials, Jim Mostyn was passionately fond of horses, and on this common ground the Melvilles and he were closely united. Even now he seldom drove his light four-wheeled trap, preferring to ride when it was at all possible to do so. To see him seated on his big, bald-faced, King Alfred horse, Mameluke, shoulders square, and feet well home in the stirrups, he looked every inch a workman. It was well known that the scars on the great, raking, ragged-hipped bay's bony hocks were the results of hard knocks against the stiff, stringy bark-rails, so much in vogue for fencing purposes thereabouts. Mostyn had a great objection to muddy roads, and much preferred cantering along the springy greensward, wide of the track, even although it was necessary to trespass on enclosed lands in order to gratify his tastes in that direction.

Old Mackenzie, the stiff Free Kirk elder, was horrified one quiet Sabbath morning to see our slim clerical friend, in his long black surtout, sailing across his far grass paddock at a stiff canter, taking a bee line for the bush church six miles away, topping the log double at the lane, and rising at the big three-rail boundary fence. The big horse had evidently hit hard through getting into a hole on the take off, for he limped on landing. In a second his rider was off, and a white handkerchief passed lightly over the injured stifle; then, as if satisfied that the injury was but slight, he remounted, and pursued the even tenor of his way.

No distance was too far, and no night too dark, to prevent Mostyn ministering to the wants, physical or spiritual, of his scattered people, who soon began to

love the young clergyman as they had revered his father before him.

On the wanderer's return after a long absence, how many objects of interest there are to visit! The old house seemed to have changed but little; the old paintings would bear a closer scrutiny than they were before subjected to; the trees in the orchard had grown so much larger, as had those in the avenue; and then, outside, there were the greyhounds' kennels, where Ruby and Reveller had stood in the old days, when preparing to do battle against the cracks of the south-east, in the palmy days of mosquito plains; the lucerne and rye-grass paddock for the brood mares of high lineage and proven worth; but the greatest interest was manifested in the stabling, not for the sake of the building, warm, roomy, and comfortable enough, but for the animals which it contained. First of all, a large, roomy box was opened, and a big brown, clean of bone and blood-like, up to any weight, and as bright as a star in the coat, turns his gentle head, and with ears thrown forward, and brown eyes inquiringly and steadfastly fixed on the intruders, seems to scan them, as if he would ascertain if among them there is a well-known face.

"This is Gladiator, by Torreador, from the old Colonel mare," says George.

No doubt he is a beauty. The withers seem to run back under the saddle; his shoulders are powerful, muscular, and sloping; neck lengthly and round; thin of mane; his ribs are round as a barrel, somewhat slack in the coupling; but his hips are wide, and the quarters well let down; beneath him his limbs are as clean as steel, the hocks powerful, and the pasterns long, giving a beautiful springy action to his gait. One might well say that there was every promise of speed and endurance in the animal before him; and any judge of such matters would be sure to observe, "What a magnificent fencer he should make!"

After Fred had gazed rapturously over the horse, his brother observed,—

“Well, what do you think of him? MacIntyre broke him, and assures me that the brown is one of the gentlest and gamest horses he ever rode. Archy has ridden him steadily over all the fences about the place, and he is no light weight. Thinking that you would enjoy a good run with the hounds, the brown has been put into good hunting condition for you, and I trust you will prove him as good as I believe him to be.”

“Thanks, very much, old man. The hunting spirit is still very strong within me, even as of old. Many a time, when riding across the sun-dried plains, with a red-hot north wind blowing a dust storm about me, I have wandered back in fancy to the merry scampers we had over the green, springy heaths; and now that I am here once more, I long to feel myself in the saddle in reality, with the damp, fresh breeze from the Southern Sea blowing in my teeth, and such a beauty as this under me.”

Good judges of horseflesh as the three are, no fault is found with the external conformation of the horse. Even the silent Rev Jim waxes enthusiastic, and one is reminded of the Druid's account of his first meeting with the crack cross-country rider, Dick Christian.

“Seated under the chestnut shade of Norton by Beningboro, I thought he was expounding the law and the prophets, but found that he was expatiating on the merits of a certain brown horse.”

When the door of the next box is opened, George remarks,—

“This is my hunter, Thunderbolt, by Bushranger, from Vivid.”

The 'Bolt is a light, wiry-looking black, evidently game, but possessed of the devil of a temper, which he shows by laying back his ears, rolling up the

white of his eyes, flattening his neck like a snake, and lifting up a flinty-looking hind hoof threateningly as the strangers appear.

As his master enters, saying gently, "Come, boy!" the black makes a playful snap at a coat-button, and then rubs a velvet muzzle on his sleeve. They have been comrades in many a long gallop over stiff country beside their beloved hounds; for even now there is one old maimed dog, Traveller, in the box with the horse. It had been necessary to accustom him to the hounds at first, for he would at one time kick at any living thing. Since the ignominious displays of colthood, when the black would rear and buck for half an hour rather than face a fence with his rider, although a great natural jumper, the stockyard having failed to keep him prisoner, he had learnt how to go straight, and there was no shirking now.

In the adjoining box is old Freetrader, an honest, game hunter, and a fine hack. Fred knew him of old, and is glad to put his arm round the muscular neck again.

George relates, as they look at the horse, how a heavy swell came up from the metropolis last year, bringing a two hundred guinea hunter with him, for a spin after kangaroo. It was a wet morning, and as he and two others, with George, were smoking their pipes on the verandah, and looking over the orchard, the new chum observed, "Bet you a fiver, Melville, just for the fun of the thing, my horse, Johnny-come-lately, goes in and out of the garden over that paling fence among the trees." "Done!" said George; and the crack aforesaid was brought out of the warm loose box, and paraded in the rain, shivering from cold, while his rider and owner donned his breeches and boots. When mounted, without going through the form of a preliminary, the bay was sent at the jump, and seeing the nature of the obstacle—a fence nearly five feet high, with an interminable array of green

leaves above it—refused, and repeated the performance again and again, to the no small amusement of the onlookers, who were ready with suggestions, such as “ Might hang him up for a while there, Downer ; get used to the leaves.” “ Give him a tumbler of whisky, old man. Can’t beat spirits in this inclement weather.” “ Good idea,” says Downer ; and they give him a stiff dose from the bottle. The effect is that he slips into the fence without attempting to rise at it, and deposits his rider on top of the paling, after which display the horse is reclothed, and sent back to the stable. “ Rather a foolish wager of mine,” says Downer. “ I never noticed the foliage so densely intermingled. No horse would face that.” “ Bet you another fiver,” says George, “ that old screw jumps it,” pointing to a bay horse walking up from the paddock towards the stable, his tail down, and his hair stand-up like the quills of a porcupine. Seeing a good chance of getting his money back and another fiver with it, the new chum accepts, saying, “ Make it a tenner if you like” ; and accordingly the wager for that amount is made. A light snaffle is put on the bay, a saddle procured from the stable, and armed with a light whalebone cutting whip, George mounts, and goes for a little preliminary canter round the stable ; then, quietly riding up to the place, that the bay may understand what is required of him, the horse is ridden back about a chain. George tightens the off rein, that is enough. The horse understands the signal ; wheeling round like a stock horse, he pricks his ears, and, with a rapidly increasing pace up to the obstacle, gathers himself together half a length from the paling and bounds over it, brushing aside the leafy boughs with a rattle, then sails between the rows of the trees for the other fence. A vision of four bright shoes greets the onlookers for an instant, and then they hear the hoof-strokes beating in an even canter on the other side. “ Give you fifty for him, Melville.” “ Couldn’t

buy the Trader at any price," said George. Could the stranger have known that under that rough exterior beat the gallant heart of the Western District crack, Freetrader, he would scarcely have hazarded the last wager, and certainly would have been glad to have the horse at twice the figure offered.

In another box is a strapping golden chestnut, Charming, four years old, by Captivator, from Ladylike. He has two white hind legs, and a white stripe down the face, and is destined for the hurdle business when the cross-country racing is in full swing again.

After looking through the boxes, the nags in the stalls are inspected. There is the tall, shapely, grey Warhawk mare, Stately, a perfect hack, and the winner of many prizes in the show ring. There also is Nimrod, the rough and ready, a rattling stock-horse, quick as a whip-crack, fast, and of great endurance, able and willing to carry you a hundred miles any day, with ease to himself and comfort to his rider.

"And now, Fred, we will inspect the king of all the lot."

The Rev. Jim's eyes brightened as his friend's attention was turned to his own good hack, Mameluke, a bay with a great white blaze down his face like a sheet, two long, white hind stockings, and grey hairs through his silky coat, fully seventeen hands high, of immense bone, and great, wide, ragged hips; not an ounce of flesh on him, one would think, and yet from his bright, sparkling eye, and silk-like, glossy skin, evidently in the best of condition.

"I used to laugh at the old 'dromedary' at one time," said George; "but since last March my views have entirely changed. You should have been with us, Fred! I never rode such a gallop in my life. They brought us in word that old Tobermory's farm was on fire, and only his wife and young children at home. I mounted the Trader, who had just come home after winning the Bay Steeplechase, and Jim,



who happened to be here that evening, was on this customer. You know, Fred, that we have always regarded our old horse as safe a fencer as any in the land. Well, I turned the Trader in a bee line for Tobermory's, side by side with Jim. There was no mistaking the direction, for a volume of smoke rose up as if from a chimney stack, and one might go as straight as a line if the fences could be crossed. We hit out through the horse-paddock and made a race of it; and every fence we came to, the reverend's big bay used to shoot to the front, no matter how I rode. He made sawdust of Cameron's six-foot paling, and knocked Bailey's big drop fence into smithereens; but he never put a toe on a post and rail, nor rattled a wire of the bare fences we crossed, though it seemed as if he was going to bang right through them. I fancy now that Jim here made him knock a gap in those two fences to let us through; they were a bit big after a six-mile gallop. Anyway, we got out there in the quickest time on record, and just soon enough to save the unprotected family. Jim's coat-tails were scorched to a cinder, for he never took time to go for a bush, but lashed out with the clerical garment; his hat too wasn't fit to travel in afterwards, and his beard was considerably scorched; but between us three, I don't know how I looked, for Jim here pulled me senseless out of the flames, in the last rally, like the game old Britisher he is. Yes, Fred, the big bay's worth a feed of oats, plain and all as he looks; and my opinion is that in the steeplechase line there's not a race in the colonies beyond his compass, should his owner ever exchange the pulpit for the post."

"Very modestly narrated, George, as far as your share in the transaction is concerned; but don't speak of your rescue from the fire. You know the balance is not even between us yet; I am still a life behind. But you may praise Mameluke as much as you like. He'd share my last crust. Still, we are never likely

to appear at the post, old fellow, as you well know, though we sometimes displace a rail."

In the old school days, when home for the vacation, George Melville and Jim Mostyn had crossed the river together in the morning to go for a hunt on the opposite heath. The water was very high. On their return they did not observe that it had risen six inches, and kneeling on their saddles, as they had done coming over, they made the attempt to cross. Mostyn's mare stumbled and sank, throwing his rider into the water, and, striking out blindly with her fore feet, as she rose to the surface, struck him on the head, leaving him senseless to drown in the dark waters. His friend, quick in emergency, diving in the turbid depths, luckily caught the drowning lad's arm, and at the risk of his own life bore his heavy burden safely to the shore. The riderless horses, racing madly to the home stables, told their tale well, with their dripping flanks and wet saddles. Nor was their pace slower back to the water, with two strong men on their backs, bearing succour; and it was needed, for there were two lads at the river's brink well-nigh done. But it was not in return for *that* that Mostyn had gone into the fiercest flames for him. It was done in the same spirit that led Melville to leave his horse in the flood-waters and give his comrade succour: a spirit of chivalrous friendship, that would have, in the old days, led each to don the helm of the Crusader, or go forth right loyally in quest of the Holy Grail.

## CHAPTER III

### MID FAIRER SCENES

EARLY in the following afternoon Fred, on the good grey mare, trotted up to The Gums for the purpose of inquiring as to the fair chatelaine's health after the severe shock of yesterday. The memory of her sweet face had haunted him ever since he saw it, motionless, with a golden coronal covering the eyes that were closed as if in peaceful sleep. Nor had he forgotten the intense interest with which he had watched her gallant efforts to restrain the 'streperous thoroughbred roan in the bolt of yesterday. He had never seen such a fine exhibition of lady-riding, nor had he ever felt so much emotion in a case of accident as when the horse fell headlong with his fair burden. To a man wrapped up hitherto in the work of his hands, with scarcely a thought of aught else, seeing in toil the ultimate fruition of his dearest hopes—the making of the wilderness into a land fitted for human habitation,—taking a delight in his labour, glorying in the length of the days, and finding even after the scorch of some unusually hot summer weather, compensation in the calm, majestic beauty of the night, with its cool fresh breezes, and the beauteous imagery of its diamond-studded canopy (night that comes to us as a mother bringing comfort to her wearied ones who have cried aloud in the unpitying glare of the sun, during the turmoil of day,—night that to all who reap of the thorns and the

thistles that "the earth shall yield unto thee" has power to bring back again, from the furthestmost bounds of her kingdom, those loved ones who have gone thither, but are unforgotten still, adown the mystic realms of dreamland, which are her heritage, till there they may walk together and hold sweet converse again)—living where, in the forest stirred by the breath of a stray breeze, the leaves seem to speak, in many, many tongues, words that can only be interpreted by the mood of the listener, now gay as his spirits are buoyant with hope, and then sad as his senses are heavy with disappointment (and these were the voices that had been Fred's companionship in his lonely rides through the apparently interminable solitudes),—how pleasant it was now to return to a peopled land, to the charm of society, the association with mankind, to the influence of sweet woman after long banishment! Even so to the townsman whose life has been spent in some great city, amid its toil and worry and bustle, is the first drive taken through the forest lands, peopled by multitudes of insects, and various birds, each with a distinctive note of its own; and to *his* senses all these things are apparent. *He* smells the incense of the flowers, the scent of the blossom on the trees, the very grass gives forth a pleasant odour, his eyes catch all the variations of lights and shades, and his ears take in all the sounds with which the air is redolent. It is only we who have lived amongst these things all our lives who fail to fully appreciate them.

To Fred returned from the far lands of the silent North, all the good things of a social life were becoming apparent by contrast. And he wondered how that wild life had had such charms for him, whose thoughts were now so occupied with the form and features of the beautiful girl he was about to visit and whom he longed to see once more.

After seeing the good grey mare comfortably

stalled, Melville strode across the gravelled walk towards the house, feeling all at once at a loss as to what he would say should Miss Dunsmere see him : a consummation he had scarcely expected. It was, however, now too late to hesitate, as his feet were on the flooring of the long, wide verandah. In response to his ring, a natty housemaid ushered him into the drawing-room. Although the object of his visit was not there, still he felt himself in her presence. The very flowers so tastefully arranged, so fresh and so fragrant, the plaques so charmingly painted, the brackets, the fans so harmoniously draped that adorned the walls, the knick-knacks scattered in studied profusion, the draping of the chairs, the deftly bordered cushions on the luxurious couches, all things that spoke of refinement and culture were suggestive of her.

Fred, on the alert for every sound, heard on the marbled tiles of the hall the crisp rustling of a lady's dress, and, as the door opened, found himself face to face with Miss Dunsmere. If she had looked lovely yesterday in the torpor of unconsciousness, she was doubly bewitching to-day, with the glow of life and animation on her face. With a low bow and a blush, Fred stammered something about his intrusion and its object ; but the winning smile, the gentle hand-clasp that accompanied it, and the words " Oh, Mr. Melville, do not apologise ! I am more than pleased to see you, and to be able to thank you for your assistance yesterday. Papa thinks I must have been fearfully injured, the horse was so frightened, and he is still sounding your praises for your prompt action," removed his embarrassment.

" Do not mention it, Miss Dunsmere. My part in the transaction was very light. I wonder, however, at your attempting to ride such a powerful, nervous horse. The fall was inevitable when the drain gave way under his feet, otherwise you might, with our

assistance, have restrained him beside the coach horses."

"The fall is all a blank to me, Mr. Melville, though I remember quite well the beautiful gallop we had over the flat, and the grand style in which Dangerous rose at his fences. He is a magnificent fellow. I have only ridden him twice. Garry, the colt-breaker, strongly advised me not to attempt to ride him (although the horse took little notice of the skirt when he wore it), because when thoroughly aroused it required all his strength to restrain him. I thought, however, that with the assistance of a double bridle he could be managed, and persuaded dear old papa to let me ride him out with him on Monday last. He went quite quietly then, and seemed to like being petted and talked to; and yesterday, when we set out to meet the coach, he champed the bit, and tossed his head about as if proud of himself, and satisfied with his lot till we started to canter, when seeing a swagsman seated beside the road he suddenly shied off, and at the same time the traveller's dog rushed out at him. Thoroughly frightened, he jumped sideways over the low fence bounding the paddock, and loosened my reins with a sudden jerk of his head, then fairly broke away, defying all my restraint. I am so sorry for the occurrence, as papa will not hear of my riding him again. He had shown himself such a splendid jumper in Garry's hands (of course *he* is a wonderful man with horses) that my hopes were that we would participate in the pleasure of many a run with the hounds, which, as you have doubtless heard, meet on Saturdays in the neighbourhood."

Melville assented, saying that he hoped before long to have the pleasure of a run with the pack, George having, with his usual forethought, had a horse especially prepared for him. He was pleased to hear that Miss Dunsmere was fond of

hunting. And from her kindly feeling still towards the runaway, he felt sure that she loved a good horse, although he felt disposed to say that he considered the roan, from his nervous temperament, quite unsuited for a lady's hack, however clever he might be over fences with a strong man on his back. He too had learnt to love a good horse, and could say with Lindsay Gordon,—

“ If man of all the Creator planned His noblest work is  
reckoned,  
Of the works of His hand by sea or by land the horse may well  
rank second.”

His keenest pleasures in the far North were experienced on the back of the thoroughbred,—the mustering of the colts from their chosen run out on the far flats, by some reedy waterhole, when judgment, pace, and the exercise of considerable bushcraft, were necessary to successfully steer them to the homestead yards ;—the periodical mustering of cattle to brand, necessitating rattling rallies with outlying mobs, usually led by some indomitable piker that may have aforetime escaped from custody,—then the work on some far-away camp when much skill on the part of horse and rider was required in order to cut out the cattle necessary. For all this work the services of a more than usually quick and enduring animal, possessed of considerable brain power, which would lead him to anticipate the movements of the wary animals, against which his rider's skill was also directed, and to frustrate promptly at each turn each successive attempt to break, were necessary. The narration of wild bush adventure, by such an enthusiast as Fred Melville, had for Miss Dunsmere an indefinable charm. Refined, accomplished, and a lover of art, she had still within her a love for healthy outdoor exercises, and a longing for the novelty of

wild bush exploration, that had issue in the fast gallops along the smooth carpet of the wayside grasses, and above all in the soul-stirring revel of hound and horse, when the dogs stole away on the scent of the red scrub dingo, so like the fox of the old country, or when, as oftentimes happened, the pack were laid on to the trail of a forester kangaroo, which led them such a merry dance over the post and rail and log fences of the surrounding country.

Mr. Dunsmere himself still loved the chase above all other pleasures, although now debarred by years, weight, and the guardianship of a beloved daughter, from taking his place in the very front rank. Still, being well mounted, as he took care his daughter also should be, he contrived to see the most of the very best runs recorded with the pack since his arrival. It is not to be wondered at that Miss Dunsmere should love the chase, inheriting as she did a fondness for "the sport of kings," and from her infancy being accustomed to the narration of chivalrous tales of the hunt, being familiar also with the sleek, well-conditioned, generous horses, the faithful foxhounds which looked so merry, their eyes sparkling, and their red lips drawn back, as if in laughter, as they muzzled out a difficult scent, each eager to be the first to begin the joyous notes of success, or to swell the merry chorus that reverberated around the cheery "Hark to Merry Maid, hark!" of the huntsman, when that grand old hound hit off the scent, and in bell-like tones proclaimed the find.

Before long the two young people felt quite at their ease, and almost as if they had known each other for years, or, as Miss Dunsmere remarked, "It seems, Mr. Melville, as if—and I cannot account for my thinking so, unless it may be from knowing your brothers so well, or from hearing Mrs. Melville speaking so much of you—we had met and were friends somewhere before, though that of course is impossible."



A casual remark of Fred's relative to the artistic feeling shown in the painting of a plaque which adorned a tripod near the piano, led Miss Dunsmere to inquire if he was a lover of art. And on his assenting, she inquired if he had visited the Melbourne Picture Gallery on his way through from Brisbane, and further wished to know which were his favourite pictures, wondering in which direction his tastes would lie. Although a simple question, it was a test one. And the fair lady felt the bond of friendship drawn closer round them as he selected the one that she too felt a softening of the heart in gazing at. It was such a poetical conception, and so beautifully executed, entitled "When the Sea gives up its Dead." Borne upwards by some invisible power out of the troubled waves of the sea is a form in all the sinewy, lissom strength of early manhood, yet with the sinews unstrung, and the body pliant as if wrapped in the heavy torpor of sleep, the sightless eyes opened and on his features the imprint of the great sealer; in his left arm holding, even as in the last moment of life he held, the subtle, lithe form of his beloved, whose head droops under its heavy burden of sun-golden hair that falls beside the dear dead face so calm and majestic. In his other arm held close is the dimpled form of a beautiful child. One foot of the man's figure is still in the sea, and the eyes that see not are turned towards the heavens, whence, through the black, lurid clouds, heavy with the drift of the rending of the mountains, gleams the dazzling brightness of celestial light. It is a sweet, sad picture, and one that on a poetical imagination would have a wonderful effect. All the beauties of the painting are discussed by these two, with the enthusiasm of artist souls, though one of them had never laid brush to canvas, from the bustle of the all too short days in which his manly spirit had found so much of labour for the hands to do; though over

his brain would steal at times some picture of the imagination, some trace of a genius that could the busy hands have been but directed in season towards the mysterious realms of art, would have earned for him perhaps a world-wide reputation, as well as given an internal pleasure that repute would have seemed poor in comparison with; for the creative power of genius is given but to few, and they, though of the earth, tread very near to the gates of heaven.

A footstep is heard in the hall, the door of the drawing-room is thrown open, and Mr. Dunsmere, clad in a riding suit, enters.

"Ah, Melville, very glad to see you, and pleased that my daughter has welcomed you to The Gums."

"Yes, papa, Mr. Melville and I are quite old friends already," laughed Miss Dunsmere.

"You see, my daughter has quite recovered from the effects of the fall of yesterday. I feared for the termination of that ride, as I knew of nothing that would stop the onward career of the horse. Speaking lightly now on the subject, my feelings were similar to those of the men who followed their master, as set forth in that admirable poem entitled 'The Squire's Last Ride,' when the gallant mare is set going by the determined, hard-riding old squire, of whom the doctors said, as he lay on his death-bed five minutes before, 'he could not live another hour,' across a stiffly enclosed country by moonlight. Those following, knowing the direction taken by the pack as they streamed *after* their master over the moonlit country, and the dangerous nature of the leaps that would have to be crossed, soliloquized as to whether the big fences would check the progress of the mare, and the answer is—

'But, Lord, 'twas not to be !  
Nothing would stop old Lightning Bess  
But the broad breast of the sea !'

Ah, well, Nelly my dear, you are spared to me for a time longer. Never again will I permit of your riding such a horse as that. It gives me pride and pleasure to see you guiding Vanguard or The Druid across country, either of which is sufficiently difficult for any other but an accomplished horsewoman."

"Ah! papa dear, do not blame Dangerous for the escapade; it was quite unpremeditated on his part, and altogether occasioned by the sudden rush of that ill-bred dog. He is beyond my power, I will admit; but his gallop is easy to sit, and I never rode such magnificent leaps in my life. Though racing at top speed, he scarcely paused at the fences, taking them in his stride, covering yards of space at each leap. I do wish I could steady him."

"No, my dear, you must never wish to ride him again. Let Mr. Melville see your horses—I know you are eager to—and afterwards we will have a cup of tea together, as I would like to have a chat with him about that wild country from which he has just returned."

"I shall be very pleased to accompany Miss Dunsmere on a visit to her favourites," says Fred. "I may as well confess at once my fondness for all the equine race, but for the weight-carrying thoroughbred hunter most of all."

Miss Dunsmere took up her wide-brimmed straw garden hat and, followed by Melville, went out into the sunlight over the white-gravelled walks, through the vine-curtained garden gate towards the long roomy stables.

Out in the courtyard the sheep-dogs Laddie, Glen, Cheviot, and Shepherd, ran with one accord to greet their mistress, wagging their heavy bushy tails, and blinking their great wise eyes for very gladness, while her little Skye terrier, Rory, barked and gambolled about her as if he had suddenly gone demented. Her "Now, dogs! no nonsense!" only made them

more excited, for they seemed to understand the tone of voice in which the words were spoken. On opening the door of the stable, four well-conditioned hacks were seen, all evidently up to weight, but the gem of the lot seemed to be the thoroughbred chestnut Sarchedon.

“ This is my favourite, Mr. Fred ; ” and as his mistress spoke, a gentle neigh from the good horse gave her greeting. If he expected an apple he was not disappointed, as one was immediately forthcoming, as well as a gentle caress on the lengthy, glossy neck. “ Mr. Melville kindly rode him for me at The Grange race meeting, for the Ladies’ Bracelet, and won it by a neck, giving an exhibition of his rare prowess in the saddle under the silken jacket. You know, Mr. Fred, every one speaks highly of your brother’s skill as a horseman, and much regret is expressed at his riding so little as an amateur. But I honour him for his forbearance, knowing how well he loves the sport, since I am also aware that he denies himself that pleasure in deference to the wish of his dear old mother, who, aged as she now is, feels anxious lest an accident should happen—and they frequently occur through the presence of inexperienced riders in the field, more especially in amateur races. Sarchedon was my sister’s hack before she married, but she now seldom rides at The Priory. Mr. Dalgleish, her husband, knows little about horses, and much prefers driving to riding. You will probably see Mr. and Mrs. Dalgleish here this afternoon, as we expect them. Good-bye, Sarchedon,”—and the chestnut is then left, endeavouring to turn round in his stall, that he may have a last look at his young mistress.

Fred is then shown Miss Dunsmere’s hunters—Vanguard and The Druid—rare types of horseflesh ; well bred, low set, and thick of muscle, the latter being the picture of activity and strength.

Mr. Dunsmere's great grey horse, Mountaineer, by Snowdon, is next inspected, and shows much quality for all his size: a horse that would bring his thousand guineas in England, without any waste of breath on the part of the auctioneer, if his prowess over timber is as good as his appearance would indicate. These things having been done, a return is made to the drawing-room for afternoon tea. Miss Dunsmere does the honours of hostess in her pleasant, laughing manner, and papa chats, in his humorous way, of the doings for the past few weeks in the district. While they are thus engaged, the grating of wheels on the gravel announces the arrival of visitors, and almost before the door can be opened, a tall fair lady rushes inside with a laugh and a "Just in time for tea, eh, Nelly?" and puts a round white arm around her sister's neck, and greets her with a kiss.

"My eldest daughter—Mrs. Dalglish—Mr. Melville," says Mr. Dunsmere, and that lady starts with surprise as she hears the name, and now for the first time notices the presence of a stranger. Coming from the light of day into a darkened room, she had not seen Melville at first, and at the sound of the surname may have expected to have been confronted with his elder brother, whom she knew more than slightly.

Fred had had time to scan the fair features before him, and noticed some resemblance in them to the younger sister, but there did not seem the same thoughtfulness depicted there as in the more youthful face. From her manner he would judge her to be a woman of the world, fond of admiration. She had plenty to say in a vivacious manner, but checked herself somewhat on the appearance of her spouse.

Bob Dalglish was a short, stout, square-built man, of very pleasing manners when he chose, and a handsome face. Spoken highly of by men who met him occasionally at some convivial gathering, still he was cordially detested by one or two who were themselves

of that class whom a man *would* be proud to call his friends, from their upright, honourable conduct. Report had it that he threw off the outward veneer in his own house, when no strangers were present, and often showed himself altogether destitute of the chivalrous attributes of a gentleman.

Two years before, when Dalglish blossomed forth on the Westerton community as the purchaser of The Priory, he was looked upon as a person of importance from the value of the estate he had purchased. Besides which he had a good knowledge of the affairs of the day, having a very retentive memory, and a certain free-handed manner which made him popular in some quarters. An attendant at all the principal gatherings in the district, he soon had plenty of introductions; and among the ladies, perhaps for his handsome face, he was a good deal sought after. Miss Dunsmere, however, seemed to possess the greatest charm for him, for he was constantly dropping in at The Gums, and was always most attentive when he met her out. George Melville was also a worshipper at the same shrine at that time, and for a little seemed to be the favoured one. Dunsmere père was very fond of him, but never cared much for Dalglish, and, quiet though George Melville was, few of his friends thought that any man could cut him out wherever his affections were placed.

Melville made an idol of her in his own mind, and yet seemed abashed in her presence. So different from the gay city man—Dalglish—who chatted of all the topics in the gay world of Melbourne society, with which Miss Dunsmere was not unacquainted, having stayed for the winter months with friends who had the *open sesame* of all that was worth seeing or doing in the gay city,—and since then she had carefully read up the society gossip in the *Australasian* and other papers, besides having regular correspondents in the gay world.

Dalgleish took the first step—proposed—and was accepted by the belle of the district before Melville could make up his mind in the affair. And although, perhaps, she had a liking for him, yet Dalgleish was so much sought after, besides being reputed a good fellow and enormously wealthy, that the gay girl, having probably not felt the sacred flame for either, accepted Dalgleish at once.

Often afterwards in fancy the steadfast, pleading eyes of George Melville would look into hers with all their eloquence, or she would hear the tremor in his voice as he spoke to her on that morning after the Hunt Club's Ball the only sentence he had ever spoken that contained in it a suspicion of a declaration of love, as he saw her, carefully wrapped up, to the carriage. It was: "Miss Dunsmere, if I can be of any service to you, call me, be it in summer or in winter, by night or by day, and although I be a thousand miles away, I will hear you and come." A slight, jewelled hand was held in his strong palm for an instant, then, ere a reply was forthcoming, the wheels rolled away, and Melville was standing on the moonlit path alone, as, indeed, a few days later, he felt himself when the Dalgleish engagement was announced.

There was another good, honest fellow who loved Miss Dunsmere with more than an ordinary love, who invested her with all the best attributes of womankind, whose devotion was as chivalrous as that of George Melville, and that was the Rev. Jim Mostyn. Of her he spoke in his heart, in the words of his favourite poet, "As the lily among the valleys, so is my beloved among the daughters."

George and he, although the subject had never been discussed between them, understood each other; but each had tested the other so severely in friendship's crucible, having shaken hands over more than one victory on the brink of eternity, that there was

no enmity between them "For the red that was never fairly kissed."

It is inscribed in the pages of Holy Writ, to which each man had learnt to bow the knee, that "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend"; and now the fickle, wayward caprices of a woman were not going to sunder the bonds of leal camaraderie, so welded in the red furnaces on the borderland of Death.

George Melville went quietly about his work—his heart was not on his sleeve—and the Rev. Jim Mostyn still visited the sick and comforted the poor and needy with physical as well as spiritual comfort; rode his rides, as untiring as ever, far out into the bush in sunshine and through rain by day, and through the black gloom of the darkest night, loving the fierce smiting of the hail on his face, for it cooled his brow, while he waged bitter internal conflict with the Devil of the flesh that would ever bring before him the sweet face and matchless form of the woman he loved still, strive to forget her as he might.

Right well he knew the solemn command of his Master, "What God hath joined let no man put asunder," and rather than desecrate with profane footsteps one yard of holy ground, poor Jim would have allowed his pure soul to step to the brink and return to His keeping, should the earthly tabernacle provided for it prove too frail a shell for its custody.

Fred as yet knew nothing of all this, though, accustoming as he was, almost unwittingly, to analyse the characters of people whom he met, he took Dalglish's measure at once, seeing behind the flimsy veil of seeming conviviality that worthy appeared in, and now pondered on the reason for that wearied look Mrs. Dalglish's face assumed occasionally, when the conversation flagged. Beautiful she was, fair and delicate of skin, and almost fragile looking, with large,



lustrous, dark, pathetic-looking eyes, around which was apparent a dark shadow. Though so fragile looking, she was full of energy, and thought nothing of walking four or five miles, or driving her spirited pair of ponies over the roughest bush roads, or up and down the steep hills which many of the roads round about traversed.

Her husband, although no horseman, gave liberally to the different race clubs, and had been president of the local club more than once. He contributed also to the Agricultural Societies, and made speeches at the show dinners, which were warmly applauded, more because of the announcement of a substantial trophy for next year than for any real merit the harangues possessed. Still, he could play billiards well, far better than most amateurs, and would sit up all night over cards, playing for whatever stakes the company might suggest. Not being a horseman, his wife gave up the pleasure of riding rather than be seen out unaccompanied by her husband, and was fain to sit in her pony carriage when the hounds were thrown off, though her whole soul went out on the rushing wind with the gay cavalry, as, to the joyous music of the swooping pack, the tramping of galloping hoof-strokes filled the air.

"Mr. Melville, Nell has been telling me of your splendid achievement in checking her big roan horse when she was in a position of the greatest danger. Do you know that when anything daring in the matter of horsemanship is spoken of in the district, and the conversation turns in that groove, a Melville is sure to have done something worthy of record, so, I presume, you are only keeping up the family prestige in acting as you did. Pardon me, I do not mean *that*, for I am sure you acted without any such thought; your only anxiety must have been to avert the serious accident that was sure to result to a lady at the mercy of such a terrified horse. Nell, dear,

you should ride Dangerous in that heavy double bridle of papa's. You remember that was the only bridle I could manage The Dancer, your horse's elder brother, in."

"I would like to try him, Rose, but papa has quite made up his mind on the subject, and so Dangerous is to be sold."

"I am sure, Nell, from what I have heard of Mr. Fred Melville's horsemanship (turning to Fred) before he left for the new country, notably the subjugation of a certain vicious chestnut, the property of the fair Miss Don—(who still rides him, and with perfect safety, and much pleasure, Mr. Melville), that he would have undertaken to cure the roan of his bolting propensities, more especially since the horse has such a reputation from his breaker as a fencer, a reputation that his escapade goes far to bear out—would you not, Mr. Fred?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Dalglish. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to be of service to Miss Dunsmere. Thanks to my brother's managing skill I shall have very little to do at home; in fact, during my stay I am to be treated much as a schoolboy home for his holidays, and really, now that all the worry and anxiety of drought and stock is off my mind, I am not ashamed to say that I feel very much like one. I will take the roan into our stable with much pleasure. His appearance would give him a kindly reception into any hunting man's loose box, though I fear that such a powerful, high-couraged horse must prove too much for any lady rider should he ever become thoroughly aroused, though at other times gentle, and to all appearance quiet."

Mr. Dunsmere, who had been conversing with his son-in-law, hearing Melville's statement, interposed with, "Quite right, Melville; the horse will always prove ungovernable for any one but a powerful rider. I would not see you on his back under such

circumstances as yesterday, for my life, Nell. I spoke to Hall about him this morning, and suppose that by the end of next week he will be in Cobb & Co.'s coach, and if he gets the upper hand of the whip of that team, the sooner he is tied behind a bullock dray the better. At the same time, I have seen the day when he would bring five hundred guineas at Tattersall's, from his make and shape alone, as a hunter for the shires. At any rate, I have given that figure for a horse possessing less substance and quality. In fact, your brother Reggy's horse, Centurion, a roan, too, by Jove! cost him six hundred, and with him he won the two Hunt Steeplechases in one day. You remember Centurion, girls?"

Did they not! The tall, fast, thoroughbred; so daring and such a magnificent fencer, yet so gentle that he would neigh when they called his name at the door of his box, and rub his soft velvet-like muzzle in the palm of a soft hand, in the hope of finding therein a sweetmeat, for with such he had been often regaled.

Did they remember more? Yes! The tall, stalwart rider in the dark blue jacket and gold cap, the brother Reg, of whom they were so proud, though his fair face was spattered with clay, and his white cords were stained with the grey, rain-soddened loam that flew from the hoofs of the leaders, as they raced over hedge and wall, till the broad hoofs trod upon

"The riband of green that stretched between  
The ranks of the multitude,"

then the face that bore the stain of battle appeared in front, and the many-tongued cry went up for Centurion! Centurion!

It was probably a train of thought which started therefrom that made them all so silent.

Mr. Dunsmere had never till to-day publicly men-

tioned the name of his son ; but now, carried away as he was by the excitement of the events of yesterday, he had done so unwittingly at the time, though he, too, now appeared to be wrapped in thought.

## CHAPTER IV

### “THE PLEA UNHEARD”

FRED MELVILLE had not known hitherto that there was a brother in the family, or that there ever had been one ; he had heard no mention of his name by his own brother George ; but, judging in his own mind, from the style of the sisters, he imagined that Reg Dunsmere must have been no ordinary-looking individual, and he could readily swear that with such associations Dunsmere frater was a gentleman, and a sportsman to boot. He was not far wrong. Reg Dunsmere was a fine-looking fellow ; an athlete, clever, accomplished, and honourable he had always been regarded. A thorough sportsman, but inclined, as most young men are who have strong constitutions and an unlimited supply of money, to be fast, that is if the making of an occasional wager, the riding of steeple-chasers, and reckless tandem driving may be called so. When the story reached his father's ears of a terrible scandal in which his son was the principal actor, and the lady a society dame, the wife of a very dignified gentleman, who had come himself to Mr. Dunsmere, and told the story with a burst of righteous indignation that carried truth with it, the father was shocked, and deeply wounded that his only son should be guilty of such dastardly conduct. He swore a great oath that his first-born should never darken his door again, that he would disown

him, that his very name must never again be mentioned in his hearing, and his anger threatened to throw him into a fit of apoplexy such as his father before him had died from. Reg, true to his early repute, had no thought of crossing the threshold of the dear old home. Nay! He would rather leave England and all that was dear to him behind without the ordeal of a good-bye—for he felt a sense of guilt, though there was no baseness in his crime—and face the unknown difficulties that would lie in his path while making a living by strength of muscle and stoutness of heart—"The valiant heart makes for itself a kingdom"—in far-off Australia, rather than deepen the disgrace the late occurrence would bring upon his father's house. The matter came about in this wise. Dunsmere had been a devoted attendant on Mrs. Cashmere, the society dame aforesaid, for a year or so previous. She was a beautiful blonde, and had a caressing way with men that showed through her beautiful dark eyes. People said she was heartless. She had married her husband for his wealth, made in the silver mines of America, and he, thinking her as cold as marble to all, let her have plenty of tether. Heartless she may have appeared to be, but it is very certain that for Reg Dunsmere the eyes gave no misleading light, for, wrong as it may have been, she loved him as women sometimes love.

Dunsmere, as is often the manner of men who seldom note the signs in the sky, did not know this, but imagined, if he thought of the matter at all, that like others he was only the fancy of an idle hour, and simply liked, as all men do, to be petted by a beautiful woman. Moreover, a month or two before this occurrence he had met for the first time Miss Vernon, Judge Vernon's eldest daughter, and at the first meeting he had fallen down figuratively and worshipped; since then Lily Vernon's fair face was always before him, and very often he found himself

at the Oaks, the Judge's residence, a favoured guest. Mrs. Cashmere very soon found out the reason of his neglect, and the passionate woman's love turned to jealousy cruel as the grave. She resolved, in her own mind, that Dunsmere should never marry Lily Vernon, and meditated revenge, although at times her eyes were wet with tears as she drank of the Marah that unrequited love held for her passionate nature.

The morrow after the City Ball, to which she had been, looking every inch a society queen in her soft clinging ball costume, where she had seen Reg Dunsmere always hovering near the quiet, gentle girl he had learned to love deeply, and who was no less enamoured of him (he had danced once with his old friend, but his eyes were ever looking in the direction of Miss Vernon, and his manner seemed cold and distant, nor did he return the pressure of the warm soft hand of his elegant partner), she sat at the escritoire in her own room, and penned an elegant little epistle to Reg, asking him to be sure and come that afternoon; she was unwell and *so much* wished to see him, and have a chat about the recent ball, as she was quite unable to go out.

Dunsmere received the note, and hesitated about going; still they had been such good friends, and, besides, she was ill, and it would seem unkind of him perhaps, after all that had passed between them, not to go. The end of it was that he went.

Half reclining on a luxurious couch in the drawing-room, whose heavy curtained windows were closed to exclude the draught, while a sparkling fire warmed the room, soft satin cushions supporting her languid form, her dainty feet encased in the neatest of patent leather shoes, on her face an air of weariness, and in her dark deep lustrous eyes a sparkle as if from unshed tears, so Reg Dunsmere found the fair lady. It was not the first time by a good many that he had thus spent an idle hour. It had been very plea-

sant for him fresh from the club's room, with its odours of tobacco and cigars, the babble of men's laughter, and the loud tones of their strong voices, thus to steal away to the odour of flowers, the incense of rare scents, and the companionship of a beautiful woman, whose laughter was musical and her voice low and sweet, whose eyes spoke in eloquent silence, and whose very gentleness had in it an indefinable charm. There had been no tender passages between them; still it is very pleasant to tread on the border land of love's enchanted kingdom, which in seeming offers so much, where the rich ripe grape clusters hang, figuratively, so temptingly low, one may enjoy the fragrance although the fruit is allowed to hang untouched. Is it only *in seeming*? Often so! Ask yonder strong man the why and wherefore of his being as he is unsympathetic and silent, toiling hard through the pitiless glare of the lovely summer's day, and yet tossing sleepless at night, mocked by phantom dreams, seeking always to be in touch with danger, and reckless of peril to life and limb. Draw aside the curtain, if you dare, and awake the sleepy guardian whose one arm encircles the heavy, soft, silent curtains of the portals of Thanatos' dominions, who hears and learns all the secrets of the souls within, and he may, in answer to your enquiry, chant a refrain he has heard in many different tones, and in all languages, ere leaning his head on his arm again—

"She said she loved me, yet one day she left me,  
Without a warning and without one word!  
Of past and future at a blow bereft me,  
The cause unspoken, and the plea unheard!"

Then perhaps you may agree, also, that it is pleasant to tread on the borders of that kingdom even as it is pleasant to walk on the soft silver sands by the great sea. Sure enough there be many afloat on its



buoyant waters, but ah, me! my friend, there be many, many sepulchred below. Some have said that the pathways in love's garden are strewn with snow-white ashes on which the footfall makes no sound, but that here and there beneath them are living coals of fire; that the ripened clusters of fruitage are only fair to look upon, there is a bitterness at the core that once tasted remains on the lips for ever! Dunsmere as yet was not one of these; he believed in the promise of things which were fair in the sight of the eyes. But to-day there was a far-away glamour over them; he saw not what was near at hand, only the picture that his imagination was painting with all the rare shading that the finger of absence can touch a loved one with. He dreamt not of the ashes that were under his feet, how then could he be aware of the hidden flame?

"Ah, Reg, so glad you have come! I really thought that you had erased me from your memory altogether, and you surely have not forgotten what friends we used to be *once*!"

Dunsmere, with a shamed face, made what excuses he could. But the dark eyes look very quizzically into his as his interrogator listened, and plainly expressed therein the doubt that existed in the mind of their possessor. What a fund of conversation can be made out of a successful ball when two people of the opposite sex meet together afterward who have been there. There was the quaint lovely dress of Miss Raby, the style of Miss Dashi, the jewels of the great heiress Miss Nevada, the eccentricities of Colonel Bibber, and all the many items that are such interesting gossip after the ball, to be discussed; but Dunsmere felt ill-at-ease when a casual allusion was made to the beauty of Miss Vernon, and when his suspicious look of inquiry met the intent gaze of the fixed dark eyes that would look into his very soul if they could, then he guessed what was coming.

"Ah, Reg, Reg, what can you see in a chit of a girl like that," and the eyes grew lustrous with the light of intense passion, and her voice vibrated to the throbbing of a strained heart. "Oh! do not hate me, dearest!" and sobbing as if a long pent-up torrent of weeping had burst forth, she rested her fair head on Dunsmere's shoulder. The pressure of the warm soft cheek, the clasp of the white warm arm around his neck, the caress of the rippling scented golden tresses that brushed his cheek, would have made him as wax in the hands of the moulder were it not that the mention of "that chit of a girl" had roused his anger, and steeled him against her blandishments. Quietly unclasping the soft arm that clung so closely, and arising from his low seat, Dunsmere said quietly, "Pardon me, Mrs. Cashmere, if I refuse to discuss my feelings with regard to Miss Vernon with you." Unconsciously the pronoun was emphasized, and the train that led to the springing of the mine was set on fire. Just as a string that is tuned to its finest notes breaks the most readily, with the rudest discord on the ear, so when the feelings are wrought upon to the highest pitch of pleasure or anger the reaction to the opposite extreme is the more sudden. The eyes that a moment before expressed the most yielding gentleness, were now lit up with an expression of anger that there was no mistaking. The lips were drawn tightly, and as the hands closed convulsively, the words hissed between the teeth "*with me!*"

"Am I then so low in your sight as to be unworthy to speak of an upstart school girl because you fancy her? You! Shall I tell her of your visits to me? No! but others will. She shall know, and, by God! you shall pay the penalty for having scorned me!" Raising herself to her full height, like a tiger roused to the extreme pitch of ferocity, her teeth closed, and with the white foam on her lips, she shrieked,

"Dunsmere. You are a traitor and a coward!" And bringing her stiffened fingers to a level with the white lace at her breast, tore the filmy drapery away from the snow white bosom and rounded arm. A second later the door was opened, and her husband, alarmed, stood at the threshold, as she fell to the carpet with a groan.

The scene explained itself to Cashmere at a glance. The shrieked word "coward" that came to his ears in the study, the torn white garments of the fainting figure of his wife, and the situation was plain. Without a moment's hesitation he rushed at Dunsmere and closed with him ere the latter could offer one word of explanation. Although accustomed to all athletic exercises, Dunsmere, staggered by the first onslaught, was driven backwards, upsetting a small ormolu table and scattering the nick-nacks with a crash all over the floor, then using the science which was so customary to him, he flung Cashmere from him, and rushed from the room. Even as he walked rapidly onward he saw in his mind the construction that would be placed on the occurrence, even as Cashmere had interpreted the scene, and for the first time in his life he felt his heart stop beating, and the blood rush from his face at the thought of its consequences. There was his honoured grey-headed father, whose counsel and example had never deviated from the path of rectitude. His dear sisters, who looked upon him as chivalrous in the extreme; and then, ah! then! there was the girl he loved with all the fervour of a first love, to whom he had plighted his troth. Would they not all regard him as a being to be despised? What could he say in his defence, if the question was asked. For his comrades, the men who had stood shoulder to shoulder with him in the sports of the field, who held a lie dishonourable above all things, but who would freely risk their immortal souls in the defence of a woman, he feared

nothing. They would accept his denial of the charge as sufficient refutation. Nor would they expect a further explanation. But then, there were two men who would sit hard in judgment on him. One was Jack Vernon, he, for his sister's sake, and the other his uncle, the chief of his regiment, Colonel John Dunsmere, who was the very soul of honour—who had always treated Reg as his own son, for the old gentleman was still a bachelor, educating him in the principle of the old knightly school from boyhood up, and instructing him in the use of the foils, single stick, and all military exercises; mounting him, as a lad, on one of his own magnificent hunters, and grounding him in all the joys of the chase (although Reg completed his education in this respect at home), for he loved the manly soldier-like lad, and feared that by his civilian father he might be spoiled. And the uncle had grown proud of the fulfilment of his hopes in the popular soldier who was still under his eye, and rejoiced at Reg's prowess in the field.

Dunsmere knew well that the whole scandal would be ablaze in very little time, and saw plainly that no word or action of his could avail to alter the decision the world would speedily arrive at. Had he in a moment of madness been guilty, he would have taken a brave man's alternative, and suffered the condemnation of a just judge; but there was no real guilt on his soul, though he knew well that he could not face the weight of evidence that was already woven against him. His resolve was taken. That night, in his rooms, he busied himself through the long silent hours in packing up his worldly goods, in order to be ready for an early departure to some far-away land.

The morrow dawned, and with the morning's post came a letter from his father. It ran,—

"In the eyes of the world you have brought eternal disgrace on our name. I could not have deemed you guilty of such

utterly despicable conduct, did I not receive confirmation of it from the surest source. It is as if I knew you were dead and yet failed to realise it. I had placed no restraint upon you, believing that the principles you had learnt at your dear mother's knee would have been your conscience, directing you in times of temptation in the right path, and in that belief I have erred, as well as in the hopes I had dwelt upon for your future. It is not necessary for you to come here to say good bye. It would only pain me to see your face. Your sisters will only know at present that you have set out upon one of your sudden expeditions. May God keep them in ignorance of the truth! What your uncle, who has hitherto regarded you as a son after his own heart, will think, you yourself may imagine. It will be as great a blow to him as to me. Endeavour in whatever country you may settle in future to act a manly and honourable part, so may your Heavenly Father forgive you in the end, for it is beyond the power of your earthly parent to find extenuation for such guilt.

"As you may require funds wherewith to pay your passage and give you a start in the new life, I am instructing Messrs. Wright & King to honour your cheque for £500—and, further, as you have hitherto looked upon your allowance from me for payment of your liabilities, I consider it my duty to your creditors to settle their accounts; please, therefore, instruct them to forward same here. For the last time I sign myself—  
Your Father."

Dunsmere read this epistle to the end, and over again. He could not bring himself to believe that he was thus cast out from the loving circle of home. Yet when he thought of the light in which his conduct was viewed, he could not wonder at the tenor of the letter. The reproach contained in it he felt more than all the railing accusations that could have been heaped upon him. How he adored the memory of his dead mother! and wild though he was, her teachings had never been forgotten.

Then there was another ordeal to go through. He must face the stern, honourable soldier, Uncle John, who would be sure to call upon him. Yet he did not fear the meeting. He could meet the steel-like glances of those clear grey eyes without flinching, but what was he to do about Jack Vernon, the

brother of the girl he loved? He was not long kept in suspense. Vernon had called upon his colonel as being Dunsmere's relative, and told him what he had heard. The colonel swore a great oath that "Reg was honourable, sir. Incapable of such conduct! Come to him at once, and have the matter cleared up." Hailing a cab they set out for Dunsmere's quarters together, and found him sitting at a table, haggard and miserable-looking, with his father's letter spread out before.

"Reg," said the colonel, holding out his hand, for he was not going to prejudge the lad, "what is this infernal scandal that is afoot?"

"I fear I have been a fool, uncle, but however black my actions may be painted, there is no guilt on my soul."

"Well, my boy, I am glad to hear that. Your denial is sufficient for me against the world!" And the hand of the grim old colonel again clasped with a strong clasp that of his nephew.

"Jack," said Reg to Vernon, "we two have been comrades in many a wild foray, and now that I'm about to leave you all with a stain upon my character, I ask of you, as a man might who is about to go beyond the veil with his lips sealed, and trust to the judgment of his God rather than that of man, to believe me as free from guilt in this matter as you have known me in all our escapades! What it means to me, old man, to pack up and leave all that makes life worth living, you cannot understand. But this much is certain, that the hand grip I have just felt has assured me that there is one staunch friend on my side, through thick and thin, and so considerably lessened the gloom I felt at my departure."

"I am with you both, Reg, and by your side in this as closely as you stood by me, old fellow, when that jungle tiger got his teeth in my arm. The man who

calls you a coward deals with me on the spot. With me! Why, there's Jim Pearson and Jack Trevor and Snowy Scott, and half the fellows in our regiment will be here presently when they hear the fix you're in, and you know that to a man they're yours to a cinder. By the time your maligner has done with the lot of us he'll begin to have doubts about his own identity, I promise you!"

After a conversation on general matters relating to Reg's affairs, the latter entrusting Vernon and his uncle with several commissions to execute for him, Dunsmere, having told them both that it was his intention to proceed at once to the docks and take a passage in the earliest outward bound ship sailing for Australia, there was a manly leavetaking between the three.

After Reg had written the following short note to his father, he proceeded to carry out his expressed intention, and so saved himself the regret of a leavetaking from many of his friends who would come, as Vernon foretold, to see him through it, if their assistance was necessary.

DEAR FATHER,—

"I am deeply grieved by your communication to hand, as you have evidently judged me without a single plea on my part. Certainly I would have said nothing in extenuation of my conduct, further than that I had been foolish, and trusted to your knowledge of me for refutation of any further indictment. Uncle John has been here, and I am glad to say shook my hand, and wished me God-speed on the voyage which I am about to take, being satisfied with a simple denial of the charge brought against me. You need not have feared an intrusion on my part, as I am too sensible of the stain my presence would seem to cast upon the dear old home. My resolution was taken to leave the country before receipt of your letter, and this intention I am about to carry out, nor will I again return while there can be the shadow of a doubt in your mind as to my integrity in this matter, even if spared to live for man's ordinary lifetime. I thank you for your kind offer of funds, I have, however, sufficient of my own money,

thanks to Centurion's double victory, for all present needs. Uncle John will kindly dispose of my hunters, Venturous and Fearnought, for which he has a buyer at any time ; the proceeds of sale will more than pay the small amounts owing by me, to which also Colonel Dunsmere will kindly attend. I offered Centurion to Vernon but he declines to accept, and will only 'keep him in clover,' so he says, till my return (?) I would give half my life almost to say good-bye to sister Nell, and would like to see Rose, but that must not be. As you wish it I will be silent concerning my paternity, but for all that you are still to me my dear father, and I trust you will yet be able, without any shamefacedness, to speak of me as

Your son, REG."

When the morrow dawned Dunsmere was on board the good ship *Orient*, bound for far Australia, there to work out the destiny which the fates had in store for him.



## CHAPTER V

### A SLEEPING SENTINEL

IN the immediate vicinity of the township of Westerton there are a great many small landholders near the river, but a mile or two out from its streets the land is held in large areas by the wealthier classes, and the fields are consequently large. Here and there, however, surrounded by well-kept productive orchards, and fronted by brilliant flower plots, the houses hidden by heavy curtains of ivy and flowering creepers, and flanked by serviceable ranges of stabling and out-houses, are the residences of well-to-do farmers. Their fences, bordering the wide lanes so necessary for the travelling flocks and herds of the Colonies, over which hedges of lox thorn or acacia have been trained, run at correct right angles, or parallel with the roadway, here visible as they bear their mantle of green up a gentle slope or over the table-lands, there hidden from sight in some gentle declivity, or behind the foliage of the succulent she-oak trees, or their deeper tinted, heavier umbraged companions of the forest, the gum trees. The whole effect taken together is very pleasing to the eye, and the very breeze coming up over the rich pastures is laden with a wealth of perfume.

You trace here and there in the valleys some creek or river wending its way towards the great Southern Sea, winding in and out of, and kissing the hem of

the flower-embroidered garment of the hills, and laving the silvery feet of the valleys. Through the foliage of the old gum trees on its banks, which interweave their boughs for its whole length over the stream, as if to prevent the day god robbing tints for his rainbow from the precious burden that is borne away to fertilize the lands through which it passes, gleams the rippling water ; and here and there, calm in its hill-shaded security, lies some peaceful lake, where sail wild ducks and graceful swans, its shore, sloping to the water's edge, carpeted with glittering sands as if for the tread of the snow white, gentle, silent feet of the naiads of ancient story, whose faces are still reflected in the star gleams on the quiet water, if you, oh ! hurrying pilgrim, will but wait and watch and see.

It is afternoon ; and the traveller, taking in all this scenery as he rides slowly along the main road, may notice in a paddock, half a mile away on his left, a horseman cantering steadily along, steel of stirrup and of heavy double bit, with its long lever curb, shining in the afternoon sun, while the reins, swinging loosely, accompany the easy motion of the horse. In deep study the Rev. Jim Mostyn is being carried along. He knows that Mameluke will take the straightest way home, and that it does not matter which pannel he selects in the fence before him, as the stiffest is within the compass of his stride.

Deadened by the heavy grasses over which they are travelling, the horse's hoofs make only a muffled sound, and, as that animal pricks his ears and quickens his stride, Mostyn is aware of the close proximity of a fence, and awakes from his reverie. At the same moment his ears catch the sound of a man's voice in angry altercation, mingled with the sobbing tones of a woman in earnest supplication, as it said words which the rider's ears could not catch, saying these :

" Oh, Ned ! Ned ! do not say such cruel things ! "

Then a man's angry curse resounded just as the big

horse rose high at the hedge, and surmounting it, landed on the other side.

Mostyn saw at a glance who the voices proceeded from; for, holding with a rough grasp the arm of a tall dark girl—whom he recognised at once as Kate O'Malley, whose brothers held the farm within sight—was Edward Blackmore, Dalglish's overseer, a man, for some reason or other, not regarded with much favour in the district, but still looked upon as a good hand amongst stock and a competent drover. The girl was sobbing as if her heart would break.

Mameluke's rider was off in an instant, and his stern "Take your hands off!" was spoken almost before Blackmore knew of the presence of a third party on the scene.

"Who the h——l are you?" ejaculated he. "I want none of your d——d interference! Look after your own love affairs. You've got enough on hand at the Priory, Mr. Whitechoker, without interfering with mine!"

Clenching his teeth till their white gleam showed between the drawn-back lips, quiet Jim Mostyn stepped quickly up to the speaker, and, deftly ducking his head to avoid the vicious right-hander aimed at his face, stretched himself to his full length while delivering a straight one, two, that felled his antagonist senseless to the ground. Then turning to the weeping girl, he said quietly—

"Kate, my girl, go home at once, and be more careful in future of the company you choose."

Blackmore recovered himself in a few minutes, and was not long in remembering what had taken place. His deeply muttered curse, and the words, "By God, you'll repent this!" were spoken in a manner that left no doubt on the listener's ears that he had made an enemy who, sooner or later, would have his revenge in some manner or other.

It was not of that the Reverend was thinking as he

continued his way steadily homewards. It was of the words spoken by Blackmore—"You've got enough on hand at the Priory,"—and the thought struck home to him like a knife thrust by a vengeful hand, causing his face to whiten at the sudden shock of consciousness that perhaps after all he was guilty, though the suspicion had never entered his thoughts before.

Have any of us failed to feel the power of such attraction as love? though its influence we have never stopped to analyse. Have all the excuses we have made to our consciences in order to justify being near the loved one, been justifiable ones? Has she been as a magnet, which drew us in spite of ourselves, binding the strength of will with invisible cords, and drawing the soul with unseen occult power, till the brain shaped within itself argument and answer that carried its own satisfaction? Has any one of us been brought face to face with the stern fact of our weakness by someone beyond the thrall, and had the full truth flashed upon him like the focus of a lantern in the darkness? And if by that light he has read within himself a savour of guilt, what a shock it was to have the soul so laid bare!

Poor Mostyn! He had never weighed well the reasons which led him so often to the Priory of late, in his rides to and fro over the length and breadth of the district. It had always seemed to him that the homestead was a pleasant place of call. The shaded wide verandahs; the dense green orchard with its ripening fruits; the cultured drawing room, and the sweet music his soul loved, which had for him a wonderful charm, exalting him as it were on the ladder of sound above the meaner clay, repeating on its tones the sweetest voices he had ever heard, breathing of hope, and whispering the glad tidings of angels.

Did the player, with her coronal of soft spun gold, appear to him as the embodiment of all that was beautiful on earth, his ideal, the one woman he would

have asked God to create for him were he the Adam of his discourses? It may have been, yet the thought of dalliance had never occurred to him. Mrs. Dalglish took so much interest in affairs in connection with the church. She visited the sick, sent wines and fruit to the poorer sufferers, and frequently, in connection with others, gave the children of the schools a picnic, and enjoyed watching them, taking so much pleasure in the amusements provided. It had thus been frequently necessary for him to consult her on parochial matters.

It may have been that, unknown to himself, a subtle influence was drawing him thither, to the thrall of which he was a willing captive. He saw all at a glance, the situation flashing across him suddenly. Yes! in the new-found light of that dastardly inuendo, he must at heart plead guilty, for an inward accusation was formulating itself against him. Conscience, hitherto silent, had awakened to life, and was whispering to him many things which it had kept silence on before. Ah! conscience, is it only to guide the guilty that thy warning finger is pointed to the dangerous paths; whereas thou art asleep when the unwitting feet of the innocent tread dangerous ground, until, mayhap, the earth is crumbling underneath on the edge of the abyss?

It would be many a day before the Rev. James Mostyn forgot the accusation he had that afternoon heard. If in his own heart he had hidden his secret, and kept it there till he thought it as carefully buried as is the yellow gold deep down in the earth, as he knew he had, how could a stranger have had access to the unseen, and with merciless hand have torn the veil away? For the other thing, the threat that he had heard that afternoon, he cared little, thinking the man who made it altogether beneath his notice; though he wondered much why such a respectable girl as Kate O'Malley should be so familiar with a man who was so notably immoral. Kate was known

as a quiet, ladylike girl. Her brothers, Pat and Denis, were steady lads, hardworking, and energetic. The elder, Dan, was however a wild fellow, given to drink, and never happy unless amongst horses. He spent most of his time now in Queensland, on stations held by ex-Victorians whom he knew, and found in the employment of stock-keeping and overlanding the sort of excitement that was for him life. He took a run home occasionally, when on one of these forays to the southern markets, to see his sister Kate, whom he loved as he did no other human being.

Could Mameluke have understood the language of men, he must have heard the bitter self-reproaches of one muttered aloud in anguish of mind, and if it be that an electric communication is established through the medium of the reins between the horse and his rider, then must the good horse have been thrilled by the fervent silent prayer sent from the inmost sanctuary of the soul of his rider, as the young divine prayed to the one true God for guidance in the time of trial.

## CHAPTER VI

### OVER THE HILLS

SATURDAY of an Australian autumn—all the hills and vales are green with grass, on which the sun smiles with a glad smile. Always are the Australian trees green: spring, summer, autumn and winter. Only a stray leaf withers, consumed with longing to leave the quiet old parent home, and be wafted away over the pleasant sun-kissed hills (at whose feet, and beyond, are spread away to the horizon the kingdoms of the earth), and adown the grassy vales which are the abodes of silence and sleep—away over the pastures of the downs, where zephyrs tread with light feet on the bending ears of swaying grasses, to skip over the undulations with a swooping kiss in a race with the shadows of the fleeting clouds that sweep across the blue arc of the firmament, soon to have its wish fulfilled in its headlong flight towards north, south, west and east, “from where the four winds blow,” and at length, weary, to go down under the warm surface of the earth bearing a mission from Spring to bid the flowers arise.

There is no fog or mist to veil the sun gleams to-day. Only a stray fleecy cloud that seems to have lagged behind its fellows in the race towards the sea with the mists they have gleaned, at early morning, over some far inland lake, comes between its gleams and the earth for an instant, and then it is gone, scudd-

ing fast away with its silvery burden. It is not only on the verdant grasses, and green umbrageous trees that the sun is shining merrily, for yonder, where a carpet of white sand borders the fern covered lands that stretch away to the forest—the home of the shy swift kangaroo—flash bright stirrup irons, long steel bars of heavy bits, and gay buckles, the glittering tires of vehicles, and the bright scarlet coats of huntsmen; and fair to the eye appears the gay laughing throng that the meet of the Westerton hounds has brought together.

First and foremost, from the attraction which it centres, is the low pony carriage with its pair of sturdy browns, driven by Mrs. Dalgleish; beside her is her relation and companion, the refined Miss Maitland, and with them the merry and accomplished Miss Staughton, daughter of the respected manager of the Bank of Victoria in Westerton; the dark velvets and furs of the ladies contrasting prettily with the scarlet coats of the gentlemen by whom the carriage is surrounded. Close behind the pony carriage is the heavy “sociable” from Rosebrook, Mr. George Melville handling the reins of a pair of powerful well-matched bay carriage horses, neatly caparisoned, all their steel accoutrements shining like silver, champing at their heavy bits. Beside him sits a natty coachman, who takes the reins as George descends to assume his place as Master of the Hounds. In the body of the carriage sits the aged Mrs. Melville, her beautiful hair gleaming white as snow under the dark bonnet, and her kind, genial face lit up with animation. She is talking to her son Fred, who stands by the wheel, having donned his beloved scarlet once more. He has led up to the carriage for her inspection, the beautiful brown Gladiator. Mrs. Melville is just telling Fred a story illustrative of the intelligence of Bronzewing, once her favourite hack, the grand-dam of the brown, on that memorable day, Black Thursday, when all



the colony was afire and many settlers had to ride for their lives. Gentle as a lady, the brown pokes his bridled head over the carriage wheel for a caress, but one ear moves backward, and his face is quickly turned, while a reddish-brown rim shows round his eye as the mottled hounds come in sight. There are two other ladies in the carriage with Mrs. Melville, and they are chatting gaily on the other side with cavaliers, who are also hunting men and well known in the district.

Bob Dalgleish drives a smart gig, and has Staughton, the banker, beside him. There is the Murray's turn-out—a dashing four-in-hand, driven by Jack Murray, and containing a load of his bachelor friends, who quickly doff their overcoats and appear in proper costume, prefatory to finding their grooms with the horses. Their sisters, driven by the steady elder brother Malcolm, come up alongside Mrs. Melville's carriage and greet the occupants. There are vehicles of all descriptions present, from the dashing traps of the leading men of the town with their lady friends, to the unpretentious spring cart of some sporting small farmer. Riding quietly, side by side, comes Mr. Dunsmere and his daughter Nellie; big Mountaineer striding along steadily unmoved by the presence of horse and hound, his long tail swinging lazily from side to side; The Druid, all alert and vigilant, yet restrained by the staid gait of his big stable companion from breaking into a merry dance from sheer cheerfulness of heart, carries Miss Dunsmere. The riders dismount at Mrs. Melville's carriage, and Mr. Dunsmere, in his usual gallant manner, compliments that lady on her handsome appearance, and some gay badinage is exchanged.

Meanwhile Fred Melville is not idle. He had looked longingly at every party of horse that came in sight by the winding bush roads, and at every vehicle that dashed up, hoping to see his fair friend's

face among them (for they were now friends very seriously indeed), and great was his inward pleasure at beholding father and daughter arriving, evidently prepared for more than a canter down the lane.

After the first greeting was over, Fred, scanning the bay, said,—

“The Druid, I see, Miss Dunsmere. I hope you are going to join us in the run to-day?”

“Yes, Mr. Melville, it is my intention to see as much of it as my pilot will permit; but papa is very much afraid of letting me out of his sight. There are so few gentlemen he would care to choose as my guide. You Australians, he says, are too fond of the jumping part of the chase to be safe leaders in a stiff country for a lady. Though why he says so I do not know, as the fences he rides over on Mountaineer are the same as those taken in the run, although we do not follow the line of the hunt always. However, we are sure of some good jumping, Druid, my boy,” she said, patting the little bay’s neck.

“By the way, Miss Dunsmere, let me introduce to you my horse Gladiator. You see that I have a good one to share with me the first run of the season for us.”

“He is a beauty, Mr. Melville. How powerful, and yet how blood-like he is. I am sure you will be in the first flight to-day.”

“How do you do, Fred, my boy?” says Mr. Dunsmere, holding out his hand. “I am very pleased to notice that you are to make your acquaintance with our pack to-day, and on such a splendid animal.”

“Thank you, Mr. Dunsmere. It is a great pleasure to me to have got even thus far towards seeing the run, but I do not think of vying with your hunting men for the brush this time. We are both, in Warburton’s words: ‘New to the country and new to the sport.’ We will be quite content, I expect, to see how the chase goes at a reasonable distance. It

would be scarcely fair to the brown to call upon him for his best exertions on his first introduction to the hunting field." (A fair excuse, Master Fred! but, ah me! it is another version of the old, old story.)

By this time Mr. George Melville has taken his seat on the impatient Thunderbolt (and a picture he looks in the saddle). This is the signal for the first move in the path. Girths having been tightened, saddles are soon occupied, and a move made towards the joyful looking pack.

Robertson, the huntsman, sits on his low, set grey jumper in their midst. Horse and man, quiet and steady though they look, are a pair bad to beat where timber is stiff. Billy Dufrocq and Dalrymple on Satellite and Harlequin are ideal whips, as the experience of many a long run has borne out. The hounds are all bustle and activity on the approach of the black horse and his rider, and soon they are lashing their sterns and lolling out their tongues around the pair. Thunderbolt, who is very handy with his heels when there is a strange dog within range, stoops his muzzle in a friendly manner to greet old Traveller, who looks up into his face. Quickly looking over the two-score heads that bear up friendly eyes towards his face, the Master calls out.

"Where is old Vanity, Billy?"

"She was lame this morning, sir, cut her foot as they came out of the kennels, so we left her in a loose box with Syren."

"Very well, boys! Harmony will be the beacon light to-day, I expect. Down Babbler, you'll have plenty of jumping presently. Make a move, boys!" and soon the cavalcade moves off slowly.

As soon as the carriages are cleared, the huntsman and Master lead off at a steady trot for the heath, and the whips exhort the straggling hounds to keep with the body of the pack. There are about twenty horsemen in scarlet present, and not a few in dark coats

and top boots, well mounted, who look like workmen.

Whilst trotting along, Fred hears a sudden exclamation from Mr. Dunsmere, who says: "Confound the thing! one of my new patent safety-spring stirrups has broken! What a nuisance when the find is so near!"

"Take one of mine, sir," says Fred, leaping to the ground.

"No! no! Melville, I would not think of spoiling your pleasure! I shall be quite content to view the run from a distance!"

"I am very sorry for your sake Nellie, dear, that we should miss our usual gallop."

"Oh, no, papa dear! do not regret it for my sake. I am sure we shall see a great part of the run from the road, and besides we may have a good gallop next Saturday."

"Permit me, Mr. Dunsmere, to act as Miss Dunsmere's pilot. It will give me much pleasure. I knew the country well some time ago, so am not likely to get into any inextricable difficulty, particularly as we may choose our own line, not being in the throng of the hunt.

"Indeed, Melville, I am only too glad to accept your kind offer. My daughter could not be under the guidance of a more experienced horseman."

"I am afraid Mr. Melville, I will only be a drag on you and spoil your enjoyment," said Miss Dunsmere; "but if you really think not, and as papa agrees, I thank you very much."

"Quick, away then!" said Mr. Dunsmere, as the conveyances came up.

Cantering steadily away the pair soon "joined the glad throng" of those "Who go a hunting to-day." The Master, in his place in front reined up, raising his hand; for old Mike, the Club's servant, who had been reconnoitring all the morning, was discovered at the

appointed rendezvous, evidently bristling with excitement over some valuable information he had to impart.

"Sure thin, Mr. Melville, sor, there's the foinest brown forrester in the fern patch beyant as iver ye see. May the divil fly away wid me if he doesn't bate the dogs till nightfall, and beyant if yez'll only go afther him!"

Good news this for the Master. Mike is immediately sent ahead, with his two yelping terriers, to give the kangaroo a start, and for the next minute hands are busily employed giving the finishing touches to horses' equipments, then feet are crammed well home in the stirrups, and fingers close on the reins, as a move is again made across to a patch of fern and dead wattle, where stands the charred remains of old stringy bark stumps, memorials of Black Thursday, when from north to south the colony was aflame. Presently there is a muffled cry from one of the hounds, and then a stern "Hark! to Harmony! Hark!" and a merry toot, toot, on the horn from the Master as the whole pack rush to the old hound's summons, and with one accord swell the glad chorus that proclaims the find.

"One moment, gentlemen, please," says the Master, and then leaning slightly forward in his saddle, he lets Thunderbolt stride away in his free easy style on the left. There is the sound of a whirlwind of galloping hoofs, a rattling of dead logs hidden in the ferns, and the game is afoot. A long line of grey rails gleam in front over the low fern tops, and the music of the hounds sounds from the gully on the other side. Thunderbolt on the left, and a score of red-coats, with here and there a coat of darker hue, rise clear of the rails. There are some merry raps on the timber, but every horse of the field flits over without punching out a rail. Fred looks anxiously at Miss Dunsmere. She sits quite steadily in the saddle, leaning

slightly back, her hands held low down. The Druid, his ears flung forward, marks his spot, and rising side by side, both horses skim over the fence as if it was only brush.

"Excellent, Miss Dunsmere! Your horse is familiar with post and rails."

"Quite!" said Miss Dunsmere, and with no angry reaching at the reins both horses settled down to the long striding gallop that marks the practised hunter.

Inwardly Fred is noting the style of the pair beside him, and remarks to himself that there is no danger of his gallop being spoiled.

Following the pack the throng sweep down towards the creek on the right, and Fred, knowing the country, rightly conjectures that the quarry will shortly seek the higher ground, dotted here and there with stringy bark clumps—the kangaroo's high tower of refuge. His bounds can carry him over the ferns, above the ragged logs that lie hidden under their fronds. Sure enough, already the leading hound, Harmony, is turning from the lower ground and breasting the slope again, and Fred and his fair companion take a pull, for they have cut off a considerable angle. The hounds are skimming along like a flight of sea-gulls along the shore, and leap over the log fence in their path like so many squirrels. It is a treat to see Thunderbolt on the left wing of the pack skim over the obstacle like a swallow, and for an instant to watch, as did also those in the carriages, the flight of the field, as unhesitatingly they compassed the piled-up logs. At a steady canter Gladiator and The Druid skipped neatly over, and a short distance further on the riders found that their course led them into the line of the hounds, and an unspoken compact was entered into between them, by some electric spark of sympathy, to be with the field for the remainder of the run. Now the hounds slipped through a big three-railer, and across the road into another formidably fenced

paddock; for the kangaroo was taking them into Murray's cattle county, which was of necessity strongly enclosed. The dark coats, on unconditioned horses, were beginning to drop to the rear, the up hill of the last half-mile having told its tale. Thunderbolt, in his proper place, going as kindly under his master's light hand as an old stager, took the fences in his stride. Robertson's grey "popt in and popt out," like the clever jumper he was. The light weights, Dufrocq and Dalrymple, riding side by side as was their wont, took the leaps in steeplechase form. Jack Murray's big chestnut came down a cropper, and a dark-coated man bore him company; while several others who had gone straight hitherto, in civilian garb, waited for a gap and retired from the run, for the pace was too fast to allow of any checks.

Pulling Gladiator back, Fred watched The Druid. Perfectly schooled as a hunter in a cramped country, the little fellow shortened his stride, came in close to the obstacle and skipped over it like a buck, treating the fence on the opposite side in the same manner. The brown horse made light of the big timber, and the pair were once more striding silently along together through the green avenues of the trees. It was pretty to see the mottled coated hounds skimming along at their top speed, anon giving vent to a burst of music from joy of the chase. The level green sward lay beneath them, not a stone being visible to jar feet of hound or horse. Now, swinging round a hill crowned with sighing she-oaks, the tortuous course of the river could be traced, and on the opposite side could be seen a wide level heath, dotted here and there with clumps of peppermint, and sprinkled with myriads of grass trees, their verdant green tops drooping over the low rugged dark stems of the shrub; and thitherward Harmony, still in the van of the battle, though Joyful strains for the lead, directs her liege comrades. Like sea-spray flung high on a rocky

coast, flashes the white silvery sand from the hoofs of the galloping horses as they race over the level. The hoarse call of huntsman and whips resounds as they urge their favourites to their best exertions, for they know the dense scents that lie to westward, and if the hounds are going to catch the brown forrester to-day, they must have him before he reaches yon dark fringe of timber, stretching away to the horizon; for there in its thickets are droves of small kangaroo to mislead them by crossing the scent in places where no man can ride.

Old Mike was right; the kangaroo he had selected for the delectation of the hunt was a flyer, and a stayer to boot. Down to the fringe of the dark red gum trees on the river's bank led the chase, and, like the fates, followed the cream of the hunt.

Fred Melville, pulling hard at the brown horse, called to Miss Dunsmere:—

"The banks are very steep and dangerous, Miss Dunsmere, in front! Had we not better take a pull, and go lower down to the old crossing?"

"Oh, no, Mr. Melville, do go on; The Druid is quite fresh! See, Mr. George is going over, and the whips and some others, I will not spoil your run," and The Druid was still allowed to have his head.

"Pull towards yonder sandy beach, Miss Dunsmere; see, higher up, Dalrymple and Dufrocq have to swim, and be careful!"

There were only small sheep tracks leading down the steep banks, and loose boulders lying on them, making the descent dangerous; but those horses, bred on the river, had clambered up and down its banks as foals, and now reached the water's edge in safety. Fred made Gladiator breast the water first, and was glad to note that the current was not a swim, although running strongly. Watching his fair charge closely to see that her horse made no mistake, for a stumble would have, in such a strong stream, carried the rider



from the saddle, the transit was made in safety to the sandy shore, and with a struggle and a snort the horses made the ascent of the bank before them without accident.

On the plateau of scented heath the hounds were being cheered on right merrily, for now they had run "from the scent to the view." The kangaroo was visible on the open, toiling onwards for his harbour of refuge. It was with a struggle he got over the first fence of the lane in front, and the next, a stiff single rail over five wires, brought him down, though he soon was afoot again steering slowly for the scrub now near at hand. The hunt became a steeplechase. Each rode his best at the tail of the hounds, and all the pent up excitement of the run burst forth. Fast as the dogs raced, Thunderbolt kept with them. Fred Melville felt the spirit of the chase strong upon him, and as Gladiator strained hard at the bridle, he felt he could dispute the pride of place with his brother, but he dared not force the pace while his fair charge was with him. Miss Dunsmere still rode with a firm seat on her horse; perfectly broken, and light in the mouth as The Druid was, he did not require a strong strain to keep him well within himself. The little beauty had never shifted his game King Alfred head throughout the run, and now it was carried steadily forward as his quick eyes sighted the fences in front. Fred said nothing. The pair beside him were going in a manner that led him to believe that they would have the timber as it came, and so in the wake of the wiry black, which rapped hard ere he lit on the road, they came at the log fence. There was no shortening stride now that the pace was on, and in steeplechase form, with just the suspicion of a clout from a hind hoof, they landed in the track of Thunderbolt, from which the white dust was rising. Not so fortunate on the right, was a well-known forward rider of the hunt, for his big bay hunter

blundered badly sending his rider over his head, and then galloped, his reins swinging loosely, for the fence on the opposite side of the road. Disturbed by the splinters which flew from the post where Satellite struck, he baulked and ran down the fence striking the quarters of Miss Dunsmere's horse as he rose at the rails. It was impossible to avert the mishap that ensued. There was a crash of splintering rails, a collision between The Druid and Gladiator, and next second the little horse, feet in the air, was rolling over on the heath. His fair rider, caught round the waist by Melville's strong arm, as his quick perception divined a catastrophe, rode safely on the wither of the powerful brown. As her scented, silken, golden hair, unbound, caressed his face, Fred forgot all; pressing his burning lips to her fair forehead in a passionate kiss, then, sincerely ashamed of his behaviour, leapt out of the saddle, assisting Miss Dunsmere to alight, and then quickly placed her on her own horse. He could not speak, his veins seemed to be leaping through his body, and a choking sensation rose in his throat preventing utterance. The touch of the warm soft cheek on his, as undesignedly he had held her close in the dread of the inevitable accident, had thrilled through Fred like a magnetic shock, and the subsequent witchery of the entwining wealth of soft spun tresses had intoxicated him into momentary forgetfulness.

A crimson flush overspread Miss Dunsmere's face as she silently permitted him to place her on the horse again. Cantering up to where the whips were dismounting, they were in time to see the hounds whipped off the game old kangaroo, which stood erect on his hind legs, a stone's throw from the scent, and bravely faced his foes. Bouncer was already badly cut and Babbler had a nasty stab in his side from a sharp hard toe.

"They deserve a bleeding after that run boys, but

as Miss Dunsmere wishes the old fellow's life spared, and hers is undoubtedly the right to his brush, we will give him liberty, and will cheerfully accord the same to him in future if he favours us again with such a run."

Dufrocq and Dalrymple moved off to a little distance with the hounds, which lolled about on the heath, panting from their recent exertions.

Miss Dunsmere was congratulated on her splendid riding all through the run by the few who were in at the death, and pleasure was expressed that she had escaped injury when the fall was made known. George Melville regretted that she should have faced the river, and turned towards Fred with a look of enquiry on his face:—

"I'm afraid I'm very much to blame, George," said Fred, shamefacedly. "It was certainly my fault for permitting it."

"Not at all, Mr. Melville. I myself am wholly to blame. I have been longing so much for a run right through with the hounds. My little horse had the name of being so good in water; and, besides, was going so splendidly, that I felt quite carried away by the excitement of the chase, and so the advice Mr. Fred gave was quite thrown away. For once I have had my own sweet will, and enjoyed the run thoroughly. It was glorious."

"We knew, Miss Dunsmere, from the places which your paternal escort piloted you over, that if Mr. Dunsmere would entrust you to a less careful guide than himself, you could go with the first flight. I must say, however, that I honour Mr. Dunsmere's caution. I am of opinion there are too many dangers in the hunting field to make it a suitable place for the slight frame of a lady. However, the presence of ladies in our field sports must go far to make us chivalrous if we are forgetting the courtesies of an older school;" and the M.F.H. raised his cap.

"Fred, you know where Dunrowan lies. It is only about two miles from here, on the line for home, and I am sure that Mrs. Craig, the housekeeper, will be pleased to attend to Miss Dunsmere's requirements. A cup of tea will, I am sure, be more seasonable to her than our strong waters," said George, flask in hand.

"I will go by the road and give an account of the run to Mr. Dunsmere, and tell him where Miss Dunsmere will be found." So saying, George Melville bowed, and Fred and his charge took the way for Dunrowan.

Very little passed between them as they rode along; for each thought of the occurrence at the fall, and felt a sensation of shyness in the other's presence that had not been felt before.

It has been said that there is a time in the affairs of men when speech is not necessary, when silence is more eloquent, and that is when each reads the thought in the other's heart or imagines it, and shapes the reply in his own in the conversation which is termed "Communion of soul." This may be the beginning of wisdom, if love be wisdom. It is certainly the dawning of life if hitherto the curtains have been drawn over the windows of the affections, for with the coming in of the light that is "neither on sea or land," visions are woven on memory's canvas that time will never efface, and in its luminations, Life with flashing sword rides triumphant over Death, causing one to tread the phantasy-peopled air with the untrammelled spirit of a god, borne on wings of Fancy through the golden realms of dreamland, with Faith and Hope as attendants to lift the veil away from the pictures hitherto hidden, and to whisper, in words of comfort and encouragement, of the great things which may be accomplished by a dauntless heart.

## CHAPTER VII

### REGARDING A CERTAIN HORSE

A FEW days after the run with the hounds, Fred Melville was once more seated on the box seat of the coach beside his old friend Hall, the driver, who was *en route* on his usual *bi-weekly* pilgrimage to The Grange.

"Glad to have you alongside me to-day, Mr. Fred! We have just taken a friend of yours out of the brake, and intend giving him a turn in the coach. MacIntyre and myself had an awkward time with him at first for about three miles, and if we had not kept the brakes well down I do not know where he would have pulled up; but he has behaved better since. They haven't got much power in the brake to work mischief! I expect he'll make time on the track, however, to-day."

A pair of leaders appeared caparisoned for the journey, and Fred at once noticed the muscular contour, clean limbs, and round Arab-like head of the Morris Dancer horse, Dangerous, that had been the cause of the accident to Miss Dunsmere. His small ears moved uneasily backwards and forwards, and his eye showed a red gleam as he endeavoured to look behind at the coach while the traces were being hooked up. There was a good man at his head and a nimble groom at the traces, and another pair of strong wrists on the reins. The latter was an urgent

necessity, for as soon as the "all-right" was given, the chestnut tail was tucked in, and with a succession of bounds that set the coach rocking like a ship at sea, the roan was off. Sparks flew from the white metallad roadway and from the gritty wheels as the powerful brake was applied, and there was a rush of people to the verandahs of the public-houses and business places at the unusual commotion in the street.

Speaking with a soothing voice, and keeping a firm pressure on with hand and foot, Jim got the leader pacified slightly, so that his ears moved backwards and forwards at the sound of his name, but the cringing of his quarters anon gave evidence that it would be unwise to relax vigilance with such a customer in the traces.

When Hall had leisure for a chat, after the coach had rattled over the bridge and was ascending the long slope of the rise, he said,—

"Mr. Dunsmere sold him to our manager for twenty-five pounds, remarking that 'he should prove an invaluable coacher if we ever got him steady enough to drive. He was at any rate too headstrong ever to make a pleasant hack.' You know we have the knack of getting unruly ones fairly peaceable after a season or two in Cobb & Co.'s conveyances. It seems a pity to me that this horse's shoulders should ever be galled by the collar. He will kill himself in the traces. It is sorry work driving a too generous horse that *will* do all the work of the team. He is too free for us. From his breeding and external conformation he should be put to cross-country work."

"You're right there, Jim; the roan is too spirited for a steady coacher; he will always do more than his fair share of the work, and go till he drops, if one may judge from his style. Look at him now, with his neck arched, the foam gathering on his quarters

and lathering the traces—tight as fiddle strings! If you touched that off wheeler with the whip the roan would go mad.”

“You have bought a good horse or two out of my team at odd times, Mr. Fred, and I would like to see you the possessor of this one. While driving along I am frequently speculating on the lost chances of horses that may be trotting steadily before me, when they might, as far as one can judge from appearances, be carrying silk or scarlet. But, above all that I have ever driven, this roan seems most eminently suited for silk attire.”

“Well,” said Fred, “you were at the cross-country work yourself, Jim, and never make much of a mistake in judgment as to the qualities of a good horse. I can quite agree with you regarding the roan, and am determined on making an offer for him for more than one reason. He seems to be a good-tempered horse, although extremely nervous. I am told that he was usually very gentle with Garry, who evidently understood him, and that he fondly hoped to see the horse educated for the steeplechase field. He is very big as far as condition goes, but, by Jove! should he become my property I’ll send in his nomination to Clibborn for the Great Western Steeplechase, and give him to Ned to prepare for it.”

“I am glad to hear it, Mr. Fred, and, for old acquaintance sake, wish you good luck with the horse. I know the manager will not refuse a fair offer, seeing that we are well supplied with horseflesh.”

It was well for all concerned that there happened to be a big sand bed in the lane through which the coach was then passing, for, alarmed at the clattering hoofs of a passing horse, the roan took fright and bolted, Jim skilfully steering his excited team round and round in the heavy sand in a compass scarcely larger than a circus ring. For many a day afterwards the wheel tracks were visible where, in describing

circles, the tires had thrown up a sand ridge on the outer edge of the track.

"I'll have him if I give a hundred for him," said Fred to himself; and it was with a sense of ownership that he said to the groom at the next change of horses, while slipping a crown piece into his hand,—

"Wash him down thoroughly, and afterwards give him a scrape and dry him, then take him out for a quiet walk round the swamp when exercising the fresh ones, and give him a good bran mash when you put his rug on. You'll not have the winkers on again, old boy," said he, caressing the steaming neck of the roan.

That evening, after the coach had reached its destination, Fred went straight up to Cobb & Co.'s office to see the manager, whom he knew well, and offered fifty pounds for the roan for saddle work. The offer was at once accepted, and the heart-and-bar brand of the chestnut roan gelding, five years, duly written down on the receipt which transferred the ownership of the Morris Dancer horse from Cobb & Co. to Mr. F. Melville, of Rosebrook. A few weeks afterwards but few people knew, when the entries for the Great Western Steeplechase appeared, what horse Mr. F. Melville's rn. g. Dangerous, five years, was, although to the smallest boy in the township the name of that gentleman's b. g. Freetrader, by Buzzard, was lovingly familiar.

Garry was rejoiced to find his favourite colt once more an inmate of his stables, and the big roan, in the neighbourhood of his old associates, no longer manifested uneasiness, as he had done in the strange stalls, but munched his corn, and carried his rug over his heavy quarters with no backward glance of fear, for a caressing hand had been all over him, and a soothing voice had told him that his old instructor was offering no indignity.



## CHAPTER VIII

### ON SUSPICION

SHOW week at Westerton is drawing nearer. The Society's grounds have been lately renovated, a new grand-stand erected, and new jumps for the hunters' trial put up. A great many exhibits were expected. It was thought that the show of Merino sheep would be large, as a great many "Tasmanians" had been imported to the district. Not a few of the men who had interest in the Riverina County swore by Wanganella sheep, and kept them on their southern pastures, and would compete against all comers, so that pastoralists would find plenty of occasion for argument as to the relative merits of the two breeds. Cattle too—shorthorn and Hereford—were largely kept, and some splendid strains of imported blood were to be found in the herds grazing on the surrounding hills. Machinery of all kinds would delight the gaze of the thriving agriculturists, and then in addition to their sheep and cattle, as many of the squatters drove dashing teams, the classes for four-in-hands and buggy horses were sure to fill well, and for the other horse stock generally there would be large entries. To all and sundry the competition for the hunters' prize was eagerly looked forward to. The crack grey Fircail from the metropolis was expected, also Moran's Shillelagh, from Warrnambool,

besides the best known horses with the hunt, as well as others that had not yet made a name for themselves.

The ball in connection with the Society was to be a grand affair. It had been the topic of conversation among the ladies for weeks, and now it was near at hand.

A great many arrangements had to be made in connection with the show, and consequently the committee, of which Mr. Dalgleish was president, had many a protracted sitting before getting the whole thing into working order. Perhaps there was a good deal of pleasure in the meeting together of so many men whose interests were identical, and it may be that many a bottle of fizz was uncorked after the exertions of the conclave were over. At any rate, none of the committee were heard to observe that their duties were arduous, although their sittings were late. From one of these protracted meetings Bob Dalgleish was cantering home at night. It was his custom to stay at the hotel when late, but his overseer had brought in a message for him from a man who wished to inspect cattle at daybreak, so as to get back to the metropolis by coach at nine o'clock. Dalgleish's horse had got lamed coming in over the stones in the evening, and therefore he took Blackmore's, leaving his overseer to take the lame horse and go home by the sand road, which avoided the stony ridge.

It was a dark night, but the horse knew the track, and kept steadily on, pulling up only at the gateways, one of which was flanked by two large gum trees. Whilst in the act of stooping down to place the wire over this gate, Dalgleish's eyes were blinded by a flash, and the next instant he fell from his horse shot through the breast.

Another person heard the shot who was also hurrying along through the night. This was no

other than the Rev. James Mostyn, who clapped his heels to his horse, and hurried up to the spot as a riderless horse galloped past him. On the ground he could see and hear the heavy breathing of a recumbent figure by the gateway. Dismounting, he stooped down and saw the now white features of Dalgleish, and was in the act of loosing the tight collar round his neck, in order to relieve the breath, when another figure stepped out of the gloom. Mostyn started up in an attitude of defence, for he thought the assassin was at hand. Stooping his head, the new comer seemed to recognise the figure before him, and at the same moment Mostyn saw that the stranger was Blackmore.

"Mr. Dalgleish has been shot, Blackmore. Hurry up to the house and tell Miss Maitland there has been an accident, and get the big wagonette, with mattresses in it, sent down at once."

Blackmore, muttering something to himself, disappeared.

Dalgleish never spoke a word. It seemed to Mostyn, while doing what he could to alleviate the sufferer's distress, as if the carriage would never come, though it was but a short time till the return was accomplished.

It was a sad journey home to the house, and sadder still when the young wife saw the white, set face of her husband, who was wounded almost unto death. Miss Maitland was cool and skilful. She was a daughter of a colonel in the army, and had taken high degrees in an ambulance class, as well as having proven herself a skilful nurse in South Africa, and now her early training stood her in good stead.

The doctor had been immediately sent for on news of the tragedy, and the police were also at once communicated with. Almost as soon as the doctor arrived, Sergeant Champley, with two troopers and a black tracker, was on the scene, and questioned

closely both the clergyman and the overseer. The former told all he knew of the affair, which was as has been related, and the latter, in a morose manner, told of hearing the shot fired and hurrying over immediately, to find the Rev. Mostyn bending over the injured man. There was no likelihood of Mr. Dalglish recovering sufficiently to give evidence for some time to come. Indeed, the doctor said that if the bullet maintained its course the end must be fatal, though not immediately so.

By the aid of a stable lantern Champley and his men, under the guidance of the tracker, carefully examined the scene of the affray, and found, close to the spot, the brass part of a discharged revolver cartridge, with four others loaded. To the skilled eye of the sergeant, familiar with all kinds of pistols, it appeared as if the weapon used had been a self-extractor revolver, '450 bore, and that the person using it had from custom thrown out all the cartridges after firing, forgetting that but one had been discharged. Close to the butt of one of the trees it was noticeable that the gravel had been disturbed, evidently by the feet of some person who had been stationed there for some time. As the dawn broke they were still engaged in covering the ground; but no further trace could be discovered, for a light rain was falling which obliterated all tracks.

When they returned to The Priory stables, Blackmore directed the sergeant's attention to the Rev. Mostyn's saddle pouch, and there, sure enough, was a heavy calibre revolver, the barrel of which showed signs of having been recently discharged. It was a Smith & Wesson self-ejector, '450 bore, and the loose cartridges found in the saddle pouch corresponded with those found by the roadside.

Striding into the room in which Mostyn was sitting in conversation with the doctor, Champley said,—

“Is this your revolver, Mr. Mostyn?” thinking

perhaps, that the weapon had been placed where he found it from sinister motives.

"It is," said Jim. "Certainly. The one I used, if you remember, the day we were practising at Rosebrook."

"Then you will pardon me if I keep it till this affair is settled. Strange to say it corresponds with the weapon probably used in the shooting."

"Most certainly, Champley, keep it, and I hope it may help to lead you out of the difficulty."

By the afternoon the most skilful surgeon that the metropolis could afford was at The Priory, having been telegraphed for over night, and all that medical skill could do for the sufferer was done. The doctor's opinion was that the bullet had passed through one of the lungs, and that the patient was in the greatest danger, for if it lodged near the spine the injury must be fatal at an early hour. And, in any case, he could not speak favourably from his diagnosis.

The whole neighbourhood was in a state of commotion when the occurrence became known. George and Fred Melville raced over in their dog-cart, and half the country-side were present, each man expressing his willingness to assist in bringing the offender to justice.

In the meantime, Sergeant Champley had received evidence that justified him in arresting the Rev. James Mostyn on a charge of shooting with intent. In fact he had no other course left open, as Mostyn was denounced to him as being, without doubt, the man who committed the deed. This caused another great stir in the neighbourhood; for if there was one man in the world of Westerton in whose integrity man, woman, and child believed, that man was their clergyman.

Champley was a gentleman, and, in making the arrest, said simply, "Mr. Mostyn, I regret having to take this step. It is almost as painful to me as to

you. But circumstances have arisen which render my course imperative for me. You have been denounced as the perpetrator of this crime, and although, without a word from you, I fully believe in your innocence, yet I must do my duty. You will have leisure to put your affairs in order during the forenoon, and if you have any communication to make with any of your friends my black boy is at your service to convey it."

For a moment the Reverend gentleman manifested surprise as the first words were spoken. Then, in his usual quiet way, he said,—

"I thank you, Mr. Champley, for the manner in which you have spoken, and am well aware that you are but discharging what you believe to be your duty in arresting me. I now see that, being the first person on the spot with poor Dalgleish, there may be in some minds a suspicion of my guilt, which will be effaced in time. As you kindly permit, I will put my papers in order, and by your servant send a short note to my friends at Rosebrook advising them of the turn that affairs are taking. Meanwhile, we will have my old housekeeper in, and I shall acquaint her, in your presence, with the news of my detention, and give what instructions are necessary for her guidance in my absence."

This was done, and Mrs. Lane retired to her kitchen weeping as if she had lost a son.

Before lunch George Melville arrived at the Parsonage in great haste.

"Good day, Champley. Jim, old man, what's this business?"

"Well, George, I am to be detained on suspicion of being connected with this outrage on Mr. Dalgleish, probably from my being the first on the scene of the tragedy. But I hope the real culprit will be discovered before long."

"Why, Champley, you can't believe that Mr

Mostyn has had a hand in this affair? Surely it is not on your own confounded suspicion that this arrest has been made?"

"Pardon me, Melville, I can say nothing further than that the arrest has been made in accordance with information given, and I am but doing my duty in acting as I have done."

For the first time in his life, as far as either of the listeners knew, George Melville's face flushed with anger, and a large purple vein rose up on his forehead, his hand clenched, and he swore a mighty oath, which cannot here be repeated, that "he would thrash Jim's calumniator, when he found him, while a breath remained in his body, or never look a man in the face again."

"The inquiry will be held to-morrow, Mr. Melville, and then we shall see with what sort of evidence you have to deal. In the meantime, my duty has been done, and I trust I may still look upon you both as friends, as we have hitherto been."

"There's my hand on it, Champley. You've proved yourself a man many a time, and as the thing had to be done, it was kind of you to come yourself."

"Mr. Champley, there is no occasion for ill feeling between us," said Mostyn. "On the contrary, I sincerely thank you for the courtesy you have shown. With your permission we will have luncheon together, and then I shall be ready to accompany you."

"Rather," said the sergeant, "will I accompany you, if you will kindly drive me in your buggy as far as the barracks, it will seem a more friendly proceeding than should I be the Jehu."

"Very good, Champley," said George; "and I, too, will be pleased to take a seat in the vehicle, for Mostyn and myself are as brothers, and we will not part just yet."

So the trio drove over in a trap from the Parsonage, without causing any unusual comments to be

made by spectators of the proceeding, and soon the Rev. James Mostyn was hidden behind the lofty walls which encircled the gaol and the governor's apartments. It is supposed that dark cells of detention await offenders behind those walls, but as the clergyman had not yet been found guilty, and as the gaoler was a good churchman, it is quite possible that the duration was not so hard to bear as the popular opinion would have us believe—in this instance, at any rate.



## CHAPTER IX

### UNDER ARREST

IN the township the excitement was intense. First of all at the scoundrelly attempt on the life of the quiet country gentleman, Dalgleish, who had thereabouts no enemies. Indeed, he had always been good to the town, helping every good work forward with no mean hand. It could not have been with a view to plunder that the crime was committed, for none of Mr. Dalgleish's valuables had been removed from his person, and the motive was shrouded in mystery. There were little groups of people to be seen in the street here and there, talking over the matter. And in the several bar-rooms of the hotels, the idle ones congregated to smoke their pipes and to ventilate the subject. The latest additions to the population of the township of the vagrant order were eyed askance, but then it could scarcely have been a loafer who did the deed, for no robbery had been committed.

Thus ran the affair, till excitement rose to fever heat when it became generally known that their clergyman had been arrested as being implicated in the shooting. From the highest magnate of the town to the lowest blackguard the idea was scouted. What, Mostyn, the clergyman ! A gentleman in every sense of the word ! A man to whom crime was an abhorrence, quick to reprove faults of any kind in others ; gentle and kind to the sick and the afflicted ! A man

that would not destroy his own dog, let alone a human being! Arrested for attempting to murder! The idea was preposterous! Revered throughout the length and breadth of the district, there was not a household but had some kindly remembrance of his good works. The young men liked him, for he was an athlete as well as a preacher. There was no fence too big for him when a short cut was necessary across country; he was a splendid whip when it came to tandem driving. Had he not also been a crack cricketer at the Scotch college, and as a runner he could now take off his coat and put down any of the locals who were in training for the sports. Where was the man who was more willing to give his aid in cases of destitution? No, the man who accused him openly in Westerton would find himself in the wrong box if any of the athletic youth of that place got hold of him. And as for the women, the aged ones loved him as a son, and the younger ones would have chosen him for a brother.

Mr. Dunsmere, seated at breakfast with his daughter at The Gums, had the tidings of Dalglish's affair conveyed to him, and immediately had his buggy brought round. Without loss of time, with Miss Dunsmere sitting beside him, he was on his way to the house of mourning. Arrived there he spoke words of comfort to his sorrowing daughter, whom the younger sister affectionately kissed and comforted. To Miss Maitland the old gentleman principally addressed himself, having seen the low state of his son-in-law, and by her was referred to Blackmore, the overseer, as being the most likely person to give details of the event. What he heard from the overseer is not stated, but his face wore an angry look as he confronted him with "It's a lie, sir!" and strode away.

It was an anxious time for The Priory household during that day, and there was a sigh of relief when

the great surgeon arrived in the afternoon and the worst was known. The greatest quiet was necessary, the doctor said, and nothing but the most skilful nursing would pull Dalgleish through. The Melbourne doctor complimented Miss Maitland on her evident skill in surgery, and was surprised when the lady said in a quiet voice,—

“It is not the first time, Doctor, that I have had the honour of a compliment from you. Do you remember a youthful nurse at the Cape Hospital?”

With a look of astonishment the doctor turned and said, extending his hand,—

“What! Miss Maitland! the daughter of my old friend Colonel Maitland? My dear girl, I am delighted to meet you again! How glad I would be to have an evening’s chat with you. But I must be off again. There are so many people in this bustling world of ours that are meeting with accidents, and they think that an old fossil of an army doctor like myself must necessarily know sufficient to patch them up again.”

“Pardon me, Doctor,” said Mr. Dunsmere, “if I did not care to distract your attention a short time ago in consideration of the gravity of the case before you; Miss Maitland is my niece.”

“I am glad to hear it,” said the doctor bowing, “and allow me to state further that you could not have a more skilful nurse at the present juncture, nor one more familiar with gunshot wounds, graduated as she has under the skilful training of her dear father, the dauntless Colonel Maitland. And now I must hurry back to my patients. You have a good man here in Doctor Hall. He graduated with high honours, and has also seen some service in the African campaign. You can have every confidence in what he advises.” So saying, the burly old doctor made his adieux, and hurried away back to the noise and bustle of the great city.

The household at The Priory were astonished when it became known to them that afternoon that the Rev. Mostyn had been arrested for the crime, and talking the matter over together in the drawing-room where all were assembled, each one was shocked that the arrest should have been made. Mrs. Dalgleish and Miss Maitland remembered how kind and attentive he had been to the wounded man ; how he had given instructions for his reception, how tenderly he had lifted him, waiting and watching over him as gently as a woman could have done.

Dalgleish himself, a hater of "shams," as he was wont to call all clergymen, had always been glad to meet the Rev. Mostyn, who, having been brought up on a station, was such a splendid hand amongst stock. He had so often given Dalgleish a good sound bit of advice on stock management, that the latter soon departed from his usual custom, and on one or two occasions had attended church, and expressed himself pleased with the logical clearness of the discourse, if he kept silence on its other bearings.

Mr. Dunsmere was annoyed beyond measure. He regretted having to leave them, but really he must go over to see the boy, and tell him that he had their sympathy.

Without further delay he was off, and in due time reaching the prison, asked for an audience with Mr. Mostyn, which was readily granted, as Mr. Dunsmere was a Justice of the Peace and much interested in the present case. Being ushered into the gaoler's sitting-room, he beheld the young clergyman seated at a table studying a pocket edition of the *Iliad*, in the original, Homer being a great favourite of his ; and walking up to him with outstretched hand, and a cheery smile on his face, he said, "Not so bad as I expected, my boy ; but yet all the same it is a dastardly shame that you should be shut up here at all, for no earthly reason ! I have ridden straight over

from The Priory, on hearing of your arrest, to convey to you our united warmest sympathy. Dalglish will, we hope, with care and attention recover. At any rate, Dr. Dash, who came down from the city, is hopeful; and we, you may be sure, will give him every comfort that can be thought of, and a word from him will put the matter straight."

"I am very glad indeed to hear that Mr. Dalglish is not in immediate danger," said Mostyn; "not for any personal reason, but simply because of the great relief you must all feel. It certainly looked this morning as if the end was not far off. For myself I have no fear whatever, being innocent, however much circumstantial evidence may be brought against me."

"You will be besieged presently by people, both from the town and country, if they can gain admission and, by Jove, the whole place would very soon be capsized if they thought any evil was in store for you, thanks to your good works, Mostyn. I am no praying man myself, but I've seen your deeds done in the dark, as it were, and I have learned a greater respect for the cloth in consequence than ever I knew, and for yourself the same kindly feeling that puts every man, woman, and child on your side in this calamity. If there is anything that you require, please let me know. If you do not, we shall endeavour to anticipate your wants. Command me if any of your business matters require adjustment."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Dunsmere, for all you have said. I expected sympathy from you, and others who have earned a name for integrity, and am very pleased to receive it. I shall be glad to hear regularly how Mr. Dalglish fares. Please convey my thanks to all for the expression of their sympathy. I shall not be harshly treated here, and I sincerely trust that my people will be allowed to see me should they come. Mr. George Melville, who came here with me, will kindly have an eye to my business affairs. You

know he has always been to me as a brother, and Mrs. Melville as a mother, since my own loss. I would be very pleased if you would call upon her, as I am sure she will feel keenly for me in my present position."

"That will I, and without delay! I am glad that you have had George with you; he is the sort of man to have on your right side in time of trouble. Please excuse me for shortening my stay, as my services may be required at The Priory. It is pleasant to note that you are in your usual tranquil state of mind, and I am glad to find that you are properly treated." So saying, the old gentleman bade Mostyn a warm good-bye.

There were, as Mr. Dunsmere had predicted, many visitors that afternoon, not the least kindly received of whom was the Irish lad Patsy O'Malley, who had ridden over fast on hearing the news. With sorrowful face he shook hands with the clergyman.

"Ye were late, sure, yer Riverince, that noight, bad luck to me for that same! And it's that black divil beyant has got ye here oi'm shure. Be aisy, sor! They can't harm yez if there's a God above to difind the innocent; and if there isn't, there may be min as 'ud go down to hell for yez, and I'm wan!"

Bursting into tears the lad withdrew.

## CHAPTER X

### IN THE SCALES

THE days sped on, and the case came on for hearing, when at last Bob Dalgleish was strong enough to appear in Court. There had been a preliminary investigation in the Police Court, but as the principal witness could not appear, the case was sent on for trial.

The town was filled to its utmost capacity over night, and all the morning vehicles of every description came in from the surrounding district. There was never such an interesting case tried in the Court. The parties immediately concerned were so well known and respected.

Before the case came on the Court room was crowded with persons who, from their positions in the local world, were entitled to admittance from the surly constable stationed at the door. And when Judge Wyndham took his seat on the bench, with an array of justices on each side, it was a large and fashionable audience that faced him. All through the case order was closely observed. The Rev. James Mostyn stood in the dock, with his usual quiet smile, just as most of those present had seen him stand in the pulpit. Dalgleish was seated, looking wan and weary. He had nodded his head in a friendly manner towards the clergyman, but it seemed to those present that he was still too ill to take much interest in the proceedings.

Sergeant Champley being sworn, stated that he was Sergeant of Police at Westerton. He remembered the night of the 10th April last. He was advised that Mr. Dalgleish had been fired upon and injured when within a mile of his home; proceeded thither with two constables and a black tracker, and found that Mr. Dalgleish had been taken home. On examining the ground adjacent to the scene of the affray by the aid of a lamp, found the five cartridges produced, one of them having evidently been recently discharged, as the interior of the brass rim was still damp from powder. Was of opinion that the revolver used was a self-extractor, and that in ejecting the shell the person having the weapon had thrown out the other cartridges. They were '450 bore, and corresponded with the size of the bullet produced, which had caused the wound. There were signs of the gravel at the foot of a tree near the gateway having been disturbed. Examined the ground at daybreak, but could find no further traces, a sharp shower having fallen in the meantime. Returned to The Priory station where Mr. Dalgleish lay; was advised to inspect prisoner's saddle pouch, did so, and found the revolver now before the Court. It is a Smith & Wesson, self-ejector, '450 bore, and was not loaded, though the barrel was clouded as if from recent discharge. Prisoner admitted that the weapon was his, but made no further statement. From further information volunteered to me, arrested prisoner that day at his own house at about 12.30 p.m.

"Were there any suspicious characters in the neighbourhood previous to the occurrence?"

"Noticed none known to the police. There are tramps passing through backwards and forwards carrying their swags daily.

"It *was* possible that the crime had been committed from motives of plunder, as although nothing had been taken from Mr. Dalgleish, yet the person



committing the crime may have been deterred from further proceedings by the approach of a third party."

"Where were the cartridges found?"

"At a spot about five paces from the gateway near the fence, and close to a large gum-tree."

"Could you discover any footprints?"

"The ground was hard and gravelly in the neighbourhood. It would be impossible at night to distinguish footsteps, though it was seen that the gravel was disturbed at the base of the tree, as if some one had been standing there for some time."

Edward Blackmore said: "Am overseer at The Priory; was formerly a drover. Remember the night of the 10th April last. Brought in a message for Mr. Dalglish. Left the station before dusk. Mr. Dalglish took my horse; the one he had ridden in was lame. Instructed me to return on his horse and take the sand track, which is a roundabout way to The Priory, in order to save the horse's foot by avoiding the stony ridge, which is on the shorter track. Both tracks meet near the gateway about a mile from The Priory. Left about 10.30. Do not know when Mr. Dalglish left. It was some time later, as the meeting was not over. Rode my horse slowly, as he was very lame. When nearing the gate mentioned, heard a shot fired, and saw a flash. Heard galloping hoofstrokes, which I took to be those of a runaway horse. Proceeded hurriedly to the spot, and saw a man lying in the roadway with another bending over him, whom I saw to be the prisoner, who had one hand on the throat of the wounded man whom I recognised as Mr. Dalglish. Prisoner started up when he saw me, a revolver in his hand, but immediately recovered his composure, and requested me to go for a conveyance to The Priory, which I did. Advised Sergeant Champley of what I had seen, and also pointed out prisoner's revolver, which was in his saddle-bag."

"Did you hear other hoofstrokes evidently ap-

proaching the scene of the tragedy other than those you have mentioned?"

"No, only heard a horse galloping away."

"Could you have heard another galloping horse approach after the flash of the pistol if it had occurred?"

"Yes."

"What distance were you from the gateway when the shot was fired?"

"About one hundred yards."

"Do you know of any motive that the prisoner could have for committing the crime with which he is charged?"

Witness was silent for some time, and at length said,—

"I believe I do."

"What is it?"

"Jealousy."

At this point there was an unusual stir in the court.

The prisoner's teeth set firm, and there was a hard light in his eyes. Even Dalgleish awoke from his lethargy, and raised his head in apparent astonishment.

"Proceed."

"It is a well-known fact, I believe, that prisoner was a suitor for Mrs. Dalgleish's hand before her marriage. He has been a frequent visitor at The Priory since, and evidently a favoured one. I myself have seen his arm round Mrs. Dalgleish's waist at night, and afterwards the lights were put out."

Mostyn as these words were spoken grew white to the lips. All eyes were turned upon Mrs. Dalgleish, who was sobbing bitterly. Three men rose up in the Court with angry glances bent upon the witness; they were Mr. Dunsmere, George Melville, and Dalgleish, and there was a murmur of indignation in the Court. Most of those present were friends of the accused and the injured man, and sympathized with each.

"Did you observe any other improper conduct between the accused and Mrs. Dalgleish?"

He did not. He lived at some little distance from the homestead, and was absent during the day, usually on the run. His presence on that night was accounted for by the fact that he had been interviewing Mr. Dalgleish in his office.

Might he not possibly be mistaken?

No; the French doors were wide open, and the interior of the room plainly visible. There could not be the slightest doubt about it.

Mr. Dalgleish, who was assisted to the box, was asked to give an account of the affair as he remembered it. Corroborated his overseer's statement regarding the message and the laming of his horse, and stated that he left the Royal Hotel at about 11.6 p.m., and rode at a smart pace for about three miles to the gateway without stopping. In fact did not see the gate; his horse almost breasted it before stopping. Unlatched it and came through. Was in the act of closing it, with his head stooped, when he saw a flash of light and heard a report. Could see no person, as his head was stooped when the shot was fired. Remembered no more.

Had any person threatened to do him injury?

He could remember no threats. Carried very little money about with him usually; never carried much.

Did he know the prisoner?

Yes, very well. Knew him and respected him. He had been at one time a frequent visitor at The Priory, but of late came seldom. Mrs. Dalgleish took an interest in parochial matters, and was lately working for a Church Bazaar to be held during Show week.

Would ask Mr. Dalgleish a question which he hoped would not have an injurious effect on him in his present state of health. He would, however, be pleased if Mr. Dalgleish would answer it without reservation, as the matter had already been ventilated in Court,

and told very much against the prisoner. Did he believe the statement of the last witness as to the prisoner's familiarity with Mrs. Dalgleish?

He did not, emphatically. Witness lied, he was sure. His wife was pure of soul, and the man who calumniated her would answer to him for it while God spared a breath in his body!

A commotion resembling the clamour of feet was heard in the Court, and a rumbling noise proceeded from where Mr. Dunsmere sat, as the old gentleman beat a tattoo on the floor with his stick. The words "Good, old fellow!" were audible from George Melville's direction. What a surprise to him it was to hear Dalgleish speak in such a strain. Verily his illness had shown him how frail he was, after all, as well as the true devotion of his wife, and it was out of this feeling that his heart had been stirred to speak as he had spoken.

The counsel for the defence.—"Has the witness Blackmore hitherto borne a good character for integrity?"

Had always found him honest since his engagement with me about ten months. Was recommended to me as being good amongst stock. Knew nothing of his previous history.

Other witnesses were examined, but nothing of import was elicited.

The Crown Prosecutor then began his address. He spoke of Mr. Dalgleish's being on the committee of the Agricultural Society's Show. The meeting of that body was advertised for the night of the 10th April. He being President was regular in his attendance. What was more likely than that the assassin had access to the newspapers, and knowing from experience that his victim did not neglect such meetings, lay in wait for him, the night being dark? The place for the committal of the crime was chosen evidently by some person acquainted with the country; for they

were told that two roads converged there, each one leading from the township to the station. Then, again, it was evident that the crime had not been committed from motives of robbery, the victim's watch and chain and his loose silver having been found intact. Besides, it was not customary with him to carry any sum of money about with him. They must seek another motive for the crime. This was furnished them by the statement of a former witness, whose sworn evidence must be credited, that prisoner was carrying on an intrigue with Mrs. Dalgleish. They all knew that love was stronger than death. They had only to look at the weekly papers to see with what frequency murder and suicide occurred as a sequence to thwarted love from jealousy, which was one of the strongest human passions,—a combination of love, hate, and anger, and was aptly described as "cruel as the grave." Again, the evidence of the sergeant of police, an able officer, as Court records could testify, proved the finding of revolver cartridges on the spot where the crime had been committed, and the discovery of a revolver in the prisoner's saddle-bag of the same bore as that used by the would-be murderer—the cartridges found on the spot exactly corresponding with those in prisoner's saddle-bag told strongly against the prisoner. It was a strange thing for a clergyman, a man of peace, to carry a revolver about with him. There were no bushrangers about; he had no property to protect; no one was likely to molest an underpaid minister of the Gospel in his journeys to and fro. Where, then, was the reason for his being so equipped? A previous witness had sworn that he saw the accused immediately after the discharge of the firearm stooping over the injured man with his hand on his throat. Was not that in itself strong evidence? Did it not seem improbable that three horsemen would meet at one lonely spot at the same hour of the night on an unfrequented

road, unless the meeting of one at least of them had been premeditated? Again, this witness had sworn that the track by which he came was of a sandy nature, and hence his horse's footfalls would be deadened, and so the would-be assassin would not hear his approach. What was the prisoner doing abroad at that time of night? His movements must be accounted for. He laid these facts before the jury as being the main points in the evidence against the prisoner. They could compare them with evidence for the defence. He had finished.

There was a rustling all over the court, and a buzzing of voices. Certainly the evidence was strongly against Mostyn, even his friends must admit. But they well knew that the calm, imperturbable face that listened to the evidence for the prosecution would be capable of putting a different construction on the affair when the proper time came.

George Melville's brow was knit as he acknowledged to himself how black the chain of evidence against his friend must look to the jury, though he felt sure that Jim could account for his presence there at that hour in a manner that there could be no gain-saying if he could only bring proof.

For the defence the first witness put into the box was Patsy O'Malley.

Did he remember the night of the 10th April last? council for the defence asked him.

Yes, that he did.

Had he seen the Rev. James Mostyn on that night?

He had.

"Where?"

"At our place sure on the Dwyer's Creek beyant."

"What was his business there?"

"Sure an' he called to enquire afther my sister. She's been at death's dure ever since the baby was born."

"At what time did he leave there?"

"About half-past tin o'clock, I should think."

"What kept him there so late?"

"Well, your honour, 'twas my fault entirely. Me ould Premier mare, Mavourneen, her that I have entered for the staplechase, yer honour, hurt her sthifle. 'Twas this way. When Mr. Mostyn was going home in the evening, I thought I would give the mare a jump afther the ould horse the clargyman rides. Shure, ye know he's a great lepper, and he's the man as can ride him too," said Patsy, turning his beaming eyes on the Reverend James, who smiled. "And be jabers, we wint into the cultivation paddock, and out over the lane into Moriarty's like birds, and then into the roadway, where the divil floy away wid me, but the mare thried to bolt aff down the road for Tim Doyle's shtable, and me pulling at her sideways, she ran intil a shtump and cut herself very bad. Mr. Mostyn he came back to me, and said, 'She's badly cut, Patsy, so she is,' tying his handkerchief over the wound. 'Get her back home and have the wound dhrished.' And so we did. It was three miles be the road every fut, and she limpin' and shtoppin' 'Twas afther dark whin we got back, and thin he would wait and stitch it up for me. O'im not much of a hand in the docthrin' line, and the mare's a bit cranky wid shtrangers. Afther we made him shtay and have a cup of tay wid us, and thin he was off. Ye ask me if I saw a revolver in his saddle-bag! Shure, don't I know it! Haven't I seen it many's the time, and the divil a finer shot is there in the counthry. Didn't he drop a crow that same evening by the hayshtack as he was ating an egg? and another wan that shtarted to fly. Yis, he had the revolver all right, but he isn't the man to hurt anything wid it, barrin' they crows and hawks, thavin' varmints. I would have gone part of the way wid him home, but he said, 'No, Patsy, I'm used to night

thravellin'.' O'im thinkin if that conthrary baste hadn't run into a shtump, ye'd have seen his Riverince coming over the schoolmaster's paddock fince on the hills beyant an hour before sunset, wherever oi'd be."

Crown Prosecutor: "You're sure of the time the prisoner left?"

"Yis. Don't I feed the mare regular ivery night at tin o'clock? and didn't he have a lasht look at her before he lift, and me wid him?"

"That will do."

There were smiles on the faces of the people in the court again when Patsy's evidence was concluded, and many a man there would have liked to grip the young Irish lad by the hand.

Denis O'Malley corroborated the former witness's statement as to the visit to the farm, the prisoner's leaving with his brother Patsy in the evening, his returning after dark, and the delay caused by the injury to the mare. Was sure it was after ten o'clock when the clergyman left, as he reminded his brother at ten that it was time to feed the mare, and the Reverend Mostyn went with him.

Mr. Melville asked permission from the judge to make a statement. It was granted. On being duly sworn he said, "A good deal of stress had been laid on the fact of the Rev. Mr. Mostyn having a revolver in his saddle pouch. He would say that that gentleman frequently carried one with him when out in the country, being an expert shot and fond of pistol practice. He had been brought up with Mr. Mostyn, and it was customary for his brother, Mr. Mostyn, and himself to carry a pistol. They usually had a tournament when the three met together at Rosebrook, as there was a friendly rivalry between the three as to accuracy. Most people knew of Mr. Mostyn's skill with the pistol."

The prisoner, in accordance with a new ruling, was



allowed to make a statement, and was listened to with breathless attention,—

‘I remember the night of the 10th April last. O’Malley is correct in saying that I visited his farm on that date, and in the other circumstances relating to the accident to the race mare Mavourneen. It was after ten o’clock by my watch when I left for home. Rode somewhat slowly, as is frequently the case when my mind is occupied. After proceeding about four miles, and when nearing the gate already mentioned, I saw the flash of a firearm, heard a heavy fall, and saw the form of a riderless horse galloping past me. Went rapidly to the scene, taking my revolver in my hand, as it flashed across me that a crime had been committed. Saw a man, whom I recognised to be Mr. Dalgleish, lying insensible on the ground. Saw nor heard no one else. Was in the act of unloosing his collar to free the passage of the throat, for his breathing was heavy, when a footstep at hand aroused me. Thinking it was the assassin, I raised myself, and covered the man for a second with my pistol. Saw it was Blackmore, and requested him to go to The Priory for a vehicle at once, as Mr. Dalgleish had been wounded, in order that he might be conveyed to his home. Was arrested that day by Sergeant Champley. Am in the habit of carrying a revolver, being fond of pistol practice. The revolver in court is mine. It was last used on the evening of the 10th April last, when, as O’Malley states, I fired upon two crows.”

“Reference has been made by a witness for the prosecution to your undue familiarity with Mrs. Dalgleish, suggesting a motive for your connection with this crime.”

“I deny the impeachment flatly. Sincerely trusting that I may be pardoned for mentioning that lady’s name here, although such course is now necessary from the complexion the accusation has taken,

I will say that for Mrs. Dalgleish I have the most profound respect. There is, however, some truth in the statement made by witness Blackmore regarding an occurrence which he witnessed at The Priory one evening, and perhaps he may be pardoned for the suspicion" (eyes of wonderment visible in the court, and a straining of ears as to what would be next said). "The facts were these : some months ago I had been spending the evening at The Priory, and after dinner some little time we had some music, Mr. and Mrs. Dalgleish being present. Afterwards Mr. Dalgleish went to his office to transact some business, and he (the accused) conversed with Mrs. Dalgleish on various topics. Whilst talking with her the drawing-room lamp flared up, caused by a sudden gust of wind, windows and doors being open, the flame catching on to the wide ornamental paper shade. Mrs. Dalgleish, who sat near it, made as if to catch the burning shade in her hands, without thought of the danger of the proceeding. I drew her to one side, at the same time throwing a large fur rug from the couch over the lamp, which extinguished the flames. Mr. Dalgleish would perhaps remember the occurrence, as the rug, which was a very valuable one, was somewhat damaged."

"I do," said Dalgleish, rising slowly, and bowing to the judge.

Counsel for the defence asked the accused if he knew of any reason why witness Blackmore should show animus against him?

Was sorry to say he did. On one occasion he had to reprove witness for his unmanly conduct towards a young lady, reference to whom had been made indirectly in Court, and further, that in consequence of a personal remark being made to him, he had so far forgotten himself as to strike witness. He sincerely regretted the occurrence afterwards, but thought that but few men would have tolerated the insult. Witness

then made use of a threat to make him repent it. Could remember that now.

Accused was cross-examined as to who the lady was in whose defence he had interfered, in order that his Honour might be satisfied on the question of animus against accused. Accused declined to say, as he did not wish the lady's name discussed. Besides, she was in a delicate state of health.

A voice: "Shpake up, yer Riverince. Shure, 'twas my sister, Kate O'Malley, yer honour. She'd be here this blessed minute, but the docthor won't let her stir."

No further evidence was taken.

The judge, in summing up, said that there was not the slightest doubt but that a dastardly attempt had been made on the life of Mr. Dalgleish. The cause only was shrouded in mystery, but, thank God, the attempt had been only partially successful. In order to carry out his vile purpose, the assassin had evidently lain in ambush in expectation of Mr. Dalgleish's return from the meeting it was known he was attending. And there again his Honour was at fault, for it had been sworn that the victim was in the habit of staying at the hotel when late. There was, however, the chance of his returning, even if the person pre-meditating the crime had not heard of the message urging his return to the station. A gentleman, also well known and respected—he alluded to the Rev. James Mostyn—had been charged with shooting with intent. The evidence for the prosecution had connected him with the affair in a remarkable manner. For instance, he was on the spot almost immediately after the report of the pistol, by his own admission, and the evidence of a witness, who swore to seeing him with a pistol in his hand, a fact also admitted by the accused. He possessed a pistol which was of the same calibre as the one used in the attempt, which further, as evidence proved, had been recently discharged. O'Malley's evidence proved the discharge

of the accused's revolver to have taken place in an innocent manner. And Mr. Melville's evidence went to show that the accused frequently carried a pistol, being fond of practice, and a skilful shot. The evidence of the O'Malleys showed that it was after ten o'clock when prisoner left their residence, and further—a fact which he would ask the jury specially to remark—the accused had returned to O'Malleys' place, having left early in the evening, to give assistance from his practical knowledge in the dressing of an injured horse. This was not like the act of a man who contemplated a murder, who would have made some excuse, if excuse were at all necessary, and gone on his way, getting into his ambush in time to prevent any possibility of his victim passing. Again, the attempt on the life of Mr. Dalgleish was made about 10.30 p.m., it was agreed by all, consequently, the distance being four miles from O'Malley's to the scene of the outrage, the accused must have ridden at a fairly rapid rate to have reached the spot at the time of the occurrence. The sergeant of police, Mr. Champley, swore that from the disarrangement of the gravel at the foot of the tree the intended assassin must have stood there for some time. Again it was endeavoured by the prosecuting counsel to show a motive for the alleged action by the accused, viz., jealousy, citing a circumstance which occurred to witness's—Blackmore's—observation, in substantiation thereof. Again this evidence had been explained away by the accused, corroborated by Mr. Dalgleish, in a manner which left no doubt as to accused's innocence of the imputation. Certainly the witness making the accusation may have honestly believed in his own mind that the accused was guilty of the charges brought against him, although the counsel for the defence had elicited facts which went to show that witness had threatened accused, and therefore must have animus against him. He would say, to

the honour of the latter, that he had refrained from adducing evidence in his own support—evidence of witness's animus against him—rather than bring the name of a woman prominently before the court. This was a manly action. They had the volunteered evidence of O'Malley that the lady referred to was his sister, who was at present in a delicate state of health. He would ask them to consider these facts well as having been sworn to, and weigh them against the purely circumstantial evidence which had led to prisoner's arrest.

The jury then retired, and after an absence of five minutes brought in a unanimous verdict of "Not guilty!"

There was great sensation in court, which was instantly quelled by the judge, who said, addressing the Rev. James Mostyn, "Sir, I have the very greatest pleasure in assenting to the verdict of the jury, and in saying that you leave this court without the slightest stain upon your character. It is with much sorrow that I regret your having been detained so long, but I feel sure that your old friends will be the more glad to extend to you the right hand of fellowship because of all that you have had to suffer, and to express their sympathy with you, as I do mine, for the occurrence. There were circumstances in connection with the case brought against you which seemed hard to break down. They have all vanished with your defence, leaving not the slightest trace of suspicion behind. The police are not to blame in the matter, as the circumstantial evidence adduced against you, Mr. Mostyn, will show. I will not detain you longer, sir, as I am sure your friends are desirous of welcoming you, as they have been staunch throughout the trial."

The Court then rose.

For half an hour afterwards there was great handshaking with the young clergyman, his closest allies

being Mr. Dunsmere, George Melville, Fred Melville, and the victim—Bob Dalglish. There was no lack of men there who had stood to him all through, and were glad to give him joyous greeting now the suspense was over.

There was one man on the outskirts of the crowd who patiently waited his turn, and that was Patsy O'Malley. When it came to Patsy's turn, he got a kindly clasp, and more than one hearty hand-grip from men whom he had thought were too dignified to acknowledge him even.

Pat was a hero for many a day afterwards.

"He'd imprison Mr. Moshtyn for taking my sishter's part, would he? the dirty blackguard! Hould yer whisht. It'll be his own turn before long, I'm thinking."

After the greetings and congratulations were over for the most part, the Rosebrook team started out of the hotel stable yard, and, seated between his old comrades, George and Fred Melville, Mostyn was escorted to Rosebrook, to be received with open arms by old Mrs. Melville, who looked upon him almost as a son.

Blackmore was immediately discharged from The Priory, receiving a month's salary in lieu of notice, and left the district hurriedly, narrowly escaping the severe thrashing that had been promised him, by disappearing without further ado. It would be a bad quarter of an hour for him if he set foot in the neighbourhood of Westerton again.

The attempted assassination, and the arrest and trial of the Rev. James Mostyn were subjects of conversation for months, but no further arrest was made in connection with the attempt on Mr. Dalglish's life, although the police were engaged in scouring the district for weeks afterwards, and the culprit was still at large.

Shortly after the trial there was a public meeting

of sympathisers with the Rev. James Mostyn, held in the Town Hall, and the building was crowded to overflowing. An address was presented to him, largely signed, testifying to the subscribers' entire confidence in him as a man and a clergyman, and praying that he would still continue to fulfil his clerical duties as heretofore, with other well-meant phrases.

In replying thereto, the Rev. Mostyn said that it had been the greatest pleasure of his life to labour as a clergyman amongst the people of Westerton and district. He had been brought up amongst them, and had only been absent a few years while prosecuting his studies. Amongst them were men whom he knew as youths, like himself, who had grown up beside him, and were as brothers to him now. There were others, his seniors, for whom he had the greatest respect as men of integrity.

He was very pleased at this proof of their belief in him, and at the very kind and genuine expressions of sympathy they had for him, not only now, when he was adjudged "without a stain," but when, as a common felon, he was incarcerated within the walls of the gaol, and stood in need of their kindly remembrances. Yet he was sorry to say that he could not comply with their urgent solicitations that he should continue to discharge his clerical duties amongst them as heretofore, for he felt that he could never enter the pulpit as their minister till the real culprit was found. Besides, after the severe mental strain he was lately subjected to, an entire change and rest was necessary for him. It was his intention to leave the district for his brother's station, in which he had an interest, in Northern Queensland, where he would likely find a sphere of usefulness in so large a tract of country. He would always be glad to hear of their welfare, and if, when all was cleared up in God's good time, they would permit him to do so, he would

be proud and happy to occupy the pulpit again, if only as a visitor.

The president of the meeting after a short interval rose up and said,—

“We heard with regret the rumour of your determination to leave the district, and trusted that our united efforts would avail to cause you to reconsider your determination. However, as your course has been fully decided upon, we can only express a sense of our great loss in being deprived of your ministrations, and wish you all the happiness that it is in the power of the Master whom you serve to bestow upon you, in the new land whither you go. You have been amongst us many years, as a boy, as a youth, as a man, and our minister, that we have learned to love and respect you as many of us—all who knew him—revered your father before you, therefore it seems hard to say good-bye. We have unanimously agreed to keep the charge vacant, merely having the pulpit regularly supplied from the city, till such time as you return, soon or late—please God it be the former! You have made the charge here, drawn and kept together the congregation, and it is therefore only your own that we are watching over for you.”

Mostyn thanked the speaker and the audience for the cordial feeling shown towards him in the propositions they had made. It had been the one purpose of his later life to work for his Church and his God. He would willingly accede to their wish regarding the charge, only stipulating that if the proposed arrangement did not work well they would settle a minister amongst them rather than be inconvenienced for his sake.

In such manner were the clergyman's adieux made to his people ere the route was taken which landed him once more among the flocks and herds, this time in the far-off northern district of Queensland.



## CHAPTER XI

### A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE HUNT

SHOW-TIME duly arrived in Westerton. There was the usual large gathering of visitors from the metropolis, as well as from the country round about, and it goes without saying that all those from that region were present. Stock of all kinds had come in, and the exhibits were more numerous than ever. The sheep exhibits were a great attraction, as the district was renowned for the purity of its blood and the quality of its grasses. Of cattle also the pens were full. Large, red, white-faced Hereford, pictures to look at, and lazy, soft-skinned, roan, short-horned cattle, for which the district was famous, were very much in evidence in their respective classes. Heavy Clydesdale horses delighted the eyes of the farmers; and afterwards there was the parade of symmetrical thoroughbreds, which were pleasant to look upon. For the breeding of this class of animal the neighbouring rolling downs were noted. Yearly, horses bred in close proximity had carried off their share of the rich prizes of the metropolis, on the flat, and between the flags. The parade of brood mares (with foals at foot) —amongst which were some well-known diamonds of the stud, viz.: old Queen of Hearts, with her Ace foal; Stately, with her Panic son; Quiz-the-Wind, with a St. Alban's colt at foot; Flower of Edinbro',

with a gay daughter of Athol; and old Camelia, by Bostonian, the heroine of many a tough struggle, with a beautiful little Patriarch trotting by her side; with many others—was watched with much interest. But to almost every one there the trial of the hunters was the chief attraction; for besides the excitement of the leaping, many of the animals were well known to the spectators, and others had a wide-spread reputation. Several had come over from the north-eastern district to contest the prizes, and it was pretty certain that, however the gentlemen's trial might go, Innisfail with her dauntless rider was sure of the ladies' prize.

The Wimmera district had two likely-looking animals engaged—Launcelot and Warrawing. From Warrnambool came Shillelagh and Souter Johnny; from the metropolitan districts there were Yorkshireman, Countess, Banker, and Firetail; while from the country round about came Union, Vanguard, Modesty, Fearnought, Freetrader, Baldy, Alfred, Blueskin, and others. There would have been a still larger entry were it not that many of the cracks in training for the coming steeplechase did not put in an appearance.

A great many people who had come from a distance had driven over, and the local magnates drove their best teams to the grounds; vehicles being as numerous in the new enclosure as in the carriage paddock at Epsom an hour before the Derby is run.

In a good position for observation were the carriages of Messrs. Dalgleish, Melville, and Dunsmere. Other carriages were crowded in close, and it was observable that most of their occupants were ladies,—the men choosing to walk about amongst the exhibits, and pass opinions on them. For the ladies the show stall had still greater attractions, although the jumping of the horses had in it a good deal to interest them.

Mrs. Dalgleish and Miss Maitland sat with the genial, aged Mrs. Melville, and chatted away gaily, as

ladies do who are in pleasant company. Miss Duns-  
mere still sat in her father's buggy, for Mr. Fred  
Melville stood beside the wheels, his long overcoat  
only partially concealing the rose and black striped  
jacket in which he was to ride old Freetrader over the  
jumps. That episode during the run with the hounds  
had never been mentioned since, and if it was not for-  
gotten, it may have been forgiven ; though that was  
no certainty to Fred, whatever he might hope. Still,  
it looked very much to a casual observer as if there  
was nothing further from the minds of those two  
people at the present juncture than ill-feeling towards  
each other. Eyes sought eyes as the words were  
spoken, and if it is not of much import to us, still the  
conversation seemed all absorbing to them ; it was  
only :—

“I'm very pleased indeed to see you, Miss Duns-  
mere, evidently enjoying a view of the gathering. Our  
little town is well favoured by visitors of distinction.  
May I ask what colours you are wearing for this most  
interesting event ?”

“You need scarcely ask, Mr. Melville ! I am not  
likely to neglect our own hunt when Freetrader is to  
do battle for us against such an invasion of noted  
horses from a distance. I notice the all rose of Banker,  
and the navy blue and gold of Firetail flaunted by  
some of our metropolitan lady visitors ; and see yon-  
der how loyally the Murrays and Rotherhithes uphold  
the all gold of Blueskin and Alfred. I do love that  
beautiful ruby and pink jacket in which Mr. Brooke  
is going to ride that dear mare Modesty. She is so  
much like those beautiful, almost snow-white horses  
that you see in so many of Herring's clever pictures,  
and her head so much resembles that immortalized by  
Landseer in ‘The Three Friends.’ But here comes  
my real favourite,” said she, as Freetrader was led  
along towards them, his bang tail giving him a real  
hunter's finish. “And there are my colours,”—lowering

her parasol so that Fred saw a knot of rose and black ribbons midway on the handle.

Fred's eyes met Miss Dunsmere's, and he stammered something about "coming home upon the shield," that made Miss Dunsmere blush. She only said quietly,—

"Do be careful, Mr. Fred, as the fences are very strongly built and high."

Fred for reply only patted the good horse's neck, and looked once more into her lovely eyes before doffing his overcoat, appearing "in steeplechase colours," according to the rules of the jumping, and taking his seat on the broad back of the good bay,—inwardly resolving to win, if it was in the power of horse and man to do so.

He never felt so light in the saddle before. His body seemed almost to float in the air; but his hands closed firmly on the reins, though giving lightly to the swaying motion of the horse's head. Freetrader was the *beau idéal* of a hunter,—mannerly, yet courageous. You had only to give him his head, and he would stand off and fly the fences like a steeplechaser; to hold him together and touch him with the steel, and he would leap feet over the obstacle, as if dreading an invisible wire, indicated to him by his rider's pressure.

All the horses were paraded together once round the ring; then they had, in Indian file, to leap a low hedge in front of the stand ere the real trial commenced. It was a pretty sight to see all the horses looking so spick and span, the bright variegated colours of the riders shining in the sun, the steel of bits, buckles, and stirrups gleaming, along the parade around the circle. Then at the signal, Modesty led off in the ruby and pink, followed closely at a steady pace by the bunched-up field. There was great cheering as the throng rose over the obstacle, scarcely a twig of the hedge being displaced. The onlookers were evidently in for an exhibition of jumping to-day that had never before been equalled on the grounds.

Yorkshireman and Vanguard were then ordered over the big leaps, of which there were five, viz.: stone wall, a double post and rail, a log fence, and a sod wall. Over the stone wall the pair flew, and over the first post and rail; then both rattled the next, and knocked the dust out of the sod wall. They were racing, and had the fences been six inches higher, they would have got over just as safely, although the fences would have been treated in much the same fashion.

Blueskin and Banker went next at a steady pace, once round without touching a fence. "Faster, boys!" said the judges, and they both raced over them, each just laying a toe on the sod wall. Then the rest were sent over in pairs, the jumping being excellent all round.

At length the field was reduced to five by the judges, viz.: Modesty, Firetail, Banker, Blueskin, and Freetrader. The leaps were raised nearly another foot by strong rails on top of the posts. And again each horse jumped faultlessly, Firetail, however, being put out through clouting the last rail with his hoof. Then the judges flagged the show ground fence, "Five foot three of a paling," as Gordon sings; and again the four went in and out beautifully, one after the other. They were then ordered to race over a single hurdle. The excitement among the onlookers was intense, each horse's partisans vociferating his name; and the ladies even clapped their hands as the big paling was crossed. The single hurdle was placed fairly in the middle of the ring. Banker and Blueskin ran round at first, Modesty and Freetrader taking it as if there were twenty feet wings on each side. The judges were about to divide the prize when Modesty's rider suggested that the horses should be tried over a single rope held by two men. Melville agreed to this, and the judges acquiesced. The mare, her rider knew, would leap a rope; she was accus-

tomed to it, having been practised for sport over it often.

A rope was not procurable, but a substitute was soon formed by tying three handkerchiefs together. This was a different thing.

The mare went first and cocked her ears at the obstacle, going straight for it as if to jump, when suddenly a puff of wind shook the loose end of a handkerchief, causing it to flutter in her face, and with a snort the ruby and pink shot round.

Next came old Freetrader at a slow canter, and everyone held their breath. His ears went up at the unexpected obstacle, but rushing it, and putting in all his strength so as to make sure of a clear space between his hoofs and the white fluttering object, he went feet over it, to the great delight of the assembled populace, who cheered horse and rider again and again, and shook hands with each other over the local victory.

Fred led his horse over to Miss Dunsmere's carriage, saying, with a bow, "Well, the prize stays at home again, Miss Dunsmere, though it was a very near thing. Your favourite colours, ruby and pink, disputed possession of the coveted trophy stubbornly. The mare is a beauty."

"You did splendidly, Mr. Fred. I was quite excited, standing up in the carriage, and cheering, but I am sure no one noticed me, all seemed similarly occupied. What a near thing it was! I was afraid when they made a line of handkerchiefs that you would be beaten, but Freetrader does not seem to question his rider's requests. When his head is turned for an obstacle he seems to understand that it has to be cleared, and does so accordingly. What wonderful intelligence he shows."

"Yes, Miss Dunsmere, he will leap a rope by lamplight, or he would jump feet over your glove if laid on the grass. You have only to hold him together at

any time and lift your hand and he will jump. May I, as a memento of this victory, and as a token of amity between us, crave possession of the knot of ribbon you so kindly wore from fealty to the hunt?"

"Yes, certainly!" then in a low voice, "there is no necessity for a token of amity between us; you know we *are* friends!"

"Thank you, I will always use the ribbon as a button hole, when wearing my colours again! But I do not require that to remind me of the giver," muttered he, bowing and making his way towards their own carriage to receive the congratulations of Mrs. Melville, Miss Maitland, and Mrs. Dalgleish, a hearty hand-shake from Dalgleish and other men friends who were near at hand.

The show was nearly over. Already teams were being harnessed up. A general expression of the words, "Hope to meet you at the ball," was being made, as fair ladies were made comfortable on the seats of the conveyances. Soon there was a long line of laden vehicles and horses on the road leading to the town, going at their best pace towards the fast-filling streets.

There would be three or four hours of quietude, and then the Shire Hall would be gay with light and movement, as the Grand Annual Show Ball would then begin.

What a busy time the waiters at the different hotels had that evening, and how the landlords excelled previous attempts in their efforts to lay before their guests dinners such as their quality demanded! The inns in Westerton had always been famous for the good cheer provided for man and beast.

Tribute had been laid on field, forest, and farm for the poultry provided—wild turkey, wild duck, pigeon, etc., and the usual array of farm-fed feathered game. Their rounds of beef were large, good, and home-fed,

which means that they could not be beaten. They had fish from the river and from the sea. Puddings of all descriptions, and jellies, transparent almost as glass ; their fruits were the product of far lands, as well as from their own unapproachable orchards. Their wines were from the Murray and from "the vine-clad hills of Bingen, fair Bingen on the Rhine." Many a man would come back again to the little town on the banks of the Glenelg River, for the sake of its pleasant scenery, its good cheer, and its genial inhabitants, and the kindly hospitality of the neighbouring squatters, when opportunity served.

At about nine o'clock the violinist and pianist—Messrs. Bowden and Keans—were heard to strike a few bars on their instruments and then run over a melody or two, as a prelude to the music of the evening. The hall looked beautiful, lit with chandeliers, and fairy lamps which gleamed from secluded nooks amongst the tastefully arranged groves of green trees that had that morning been bending to the breeze in the forest, now decorated with suspended flowers and many-coloured small flags. The floor glistened again so well was it waxed.

Already gentlemen began to arrive, entering the cloak-room for a chat while dispossessing themselves of overcoats and heavy walking boots, to appear presently in correct evening costume from top to toe.

Soon was heard more musical laughter and sweeter voices as to the door of the ladies' rooms were escorted the fair dames, most of whom were that day spectators at the show ground, clad in furs and velvets. Soon, too, the ball room was gay with their presence, the lamps gleaming on dresses of silk and of satin, on white rounded arms, and alabaster necks and bosoms gleaming with necklets and jewels, and diamonds sparkling in cosy nooks of gleaming golden hair, or flashing from their setting in dark ebony tresses where



twined the faintest suspicion of crimson. This ball will not be forgotten for many a day to come.

With Mr. Dunsmere came his daughters, Miss Dunsmere and Mrs. Dalgleish, and his niece, Miss Maitland, tall and stately, a very queen. More than one man there would willingly fall down at her feet, but she has the same courteous manner to each, never even yielding to a flirtation of the eyes. Brave, good girl! There was a time when the tones of one voice were as music to her heart, and the clasp of a hand the all in all to her. But those days were over when the roll-call was not answered to by Jack Danvers in the days of Isandhlwana, when those who were then reported missing were never again seen alive!

Soon all the ladies are busy with pencils and programmes, and one has leisure to note that Mrs. Dalgleish is charmingly clad in a dress of eau-de-nil. Miss Maitland looks handsome in black surah with bugle trimmings and pink roses in her hair. Miss Dunsmere wears white silk, her only ornament being a single red rose tied with a small black bow. Miss Murray, a tall stately brunette, looks admirable in cardinal. Miss Robertson wears a pretty costume of blue faille. Miss Wyndham, a belle from the Metropolis, wears a charming dress of heliotrope crepon. Cream, crimson, white, pink, light blue, buttercup, and all the other colours which ladies of taste affect for ball dresses (*vide* report in local paper from which above is quoted) were there represented, intermingled with the dark evening dress and white facings of the men, and visible under lamps of great brilliancy, presented a picture that will not readily be forgotten.

Miss Dunsmere engaged in conversation with Mr. George Melville, whose dress clothes suited him to perfection (just as his black velvet hunting cap and scarlet coat became him in the hunting field), and looked anxiously around from time to time whilst playing with the pencil of her ball programme, for

Fred had not yet put in an appearance. She seemed anxious to detain George in conversation, for there were several men of her acquaintance near at hand talking together, who were evidently not going to make a move till their names were written down on her programme. Melville was not loth to converse with her, she was such a charming girl, besides he was not a dancing man; in fact as long as he had one dance with each of the ladies who were on visiting terms with Mrs. Melville, his mother, he was satisfied. Fred had always been the dandy of the two.

Could Miss Dunsmere have looked past two or three slow goers, standing with empty programmes in the doorway of the gentlemen's cloak-room, she might have seen Mr. Fred nervously playing with his gloves, evidently killing time. He could not make up his mind to go straight up to Miss Dunsmere before all the people, he who was usually so careless of what others might say or do. He felt as if he was wearing his heart on his sleeve, and that every one would notice his love for her.

While thus debating, the music suddenly began the sweet strains of the Venetia waltz, and ladies began to file down the room on the arms of their partners. George Melville, awaking to the situation, apologised seriously for having detained Miss Dunsmere so long, and bowed, moving away. Then came a rush of the laggards, who were still in waiting, and Miss Dunsmere was surrounded. She felt hurt at the negligence of Mr. Fred Melville, and cheerfully engaged herself for all the dances up till supper time. Fred saw her surrounded by eager applicants on his entrance to the ball-room, and judging that he would have no show, got the half of his programme filled with engagements to ladies, some of whom he knew could not dance at all well. He felt a kind of stupid obstinate spirit working within him, and was careless of what he did.

Presently the room was all motion, and alive with

the sound of swaying, rustling silks and gliding feet, marking the dreamy time of that lovely waltz, played with perfect accord by piano and violin accompaniment. Ever and anon Fred shot a glance to where Miss Dunsmere was dancing, or enjoying a rest when the music ceased, and with a pained feeling at his heart he noticed that she had danced more than once with Brooke, whose colours—the ruby and pink—the fair lady that day had considered lovely. Brooke was a tall, handsome, dark fellow, skilled in the sports of the field, yet at home in the drawing room, a man with whom any lady might fall in love. So Fred thought, and he felt the blood rushing to his face as he fancied that Miss Dunsmere must like him very much.

While dancing the next dance with Mrs. Dalglish that lady said:—

“I thought you and Nelly were great friends! I have not seen you dance a single dance with her this evening. What is wrong? If you do not go and speak to her after our dance, I shall be very much annoyed, Mr. Fred.”

Fred murmured something about being late in the field, but promised that he would see Miss Dunsmere's programme when that dance was concluded. Accordingly when the music ceased he came across to Miss Dunsmere and bowed, inquiring if he might have the pleasure of a dance that evening. The lady smiled slightly, feeling hurt at his neglect of her, and stated that she could give him the first waltz after supper; would that do? Melville thanked her and withdrew, feeling, now that the ice was broken, what a fool he had been. He had the anguish of seeing Brooke sitting next to her at the supper-table, and making himself as agreeable as he could, for he was naturally courteous, and while a manly fellow, was with it a perfect ladies' man.

The tables were charmingly decorated with flowers,

—white, yellow, and deep red chrysanthemums, dark coloured dahlias set in sprays of asparagus, delicate mauve and white cosmos, small sunflowers, and here and there beautiful cloth of gold roses ; whilst amongst them nestled, as beside a soft loving cheek, love's own darling flower the red, red rose ! There were ferns, too, of choice varieties, and here and there on the long table pretty trailing green fronds marked the place where stood a verdant grass tree. The gleam of glasses, the glitter of crystals, the red, rosy light of wine flagons, the clink of steel, the murmur of voices, and the ripple of laughter, all these things were blended, and the effect was charming in the extreme. After the supper, over which the ladies lingered, chatting merrily or cracking bon-bons, Fred apologised to the lady who sat next to him, when her partner came to assert his claim for the next dance, and then going round to Miss Dunsmere said, " The next is our dance, I think. Shall we promenade for a little with the others ? The music has not yet commenced."

Miss Dunsmere bowed, and rose silently, taking his arm. The touch of that light hand on his coat sleeve thrilled through Fred. He felt for a moment the hot blood surging to his brain, and then he heard her sweet voice.

" Mr. Melville, I feel hurt at your not coming near me all the evening. I quite expected to have seen you almost as soon as the ball opened. We were, I thought, good friends."

Fred felt the witchery of the soft gentle voice, and his feelings having been wrought upon all the evening, he spoke in the deep tones of a man who speaks from his heart.

" Pardon me, Miss Dunsmere, I am a fool ! I would sooner be near you than anywhere on earth, and yet I felt afraid to go. You looked so charming to-night, and I felt such a rough backblocker. I have been as miserable as a man could well be this evening, all

through seeing some one else monopolising you while I was afraid to speak a word on my own behalf."

Miss Dunsmere made no reply, for just then the music of the Thespian waltz commenced, a strong arm stole round her waist, and she was borne off down the room in the glittering whirl. Little was said by either of them, yet when their next dance came off that evening, each seemed to understand the other. They saw and heard nothing save the dreamy notes of the music, for the soul of each was steeped in the intoxication of the perfume of that rose that Love holds to the lips of mortals once in a lifetime, though once tasted its fragrance will linger there till the icy fingers of Thanatos remove it thence "when man goeth to the dust from whence he came."

## CHAPTER XII

### BETWEEN THE FLAGS

IT can be said with truth that there is no dull season of the year in a Victorian up-country town of any magnitude, such as Westerton, for instance ; for even in the winter it is pleasant to be out and about during the day. Besides, those who can afford it may enjoy coursing—for the hares are strong and fast thereabouts—or go out with the hounds on Saturdays. There are football matches, steeplechase meetings, and riding and driving in galore. In the evenings there may be lectures, concerts, winter parties, etc., for those who take pleasure in these things.

There are dull days, it may be, when the rains come down and the hills are covered with a veil of mist ; but then rain is necessary for the growth of the grass and the welfare of the farmers' young grain, every one being glad of the moisture ; for will not the sun again shine with its wonted brilliancy when the shower is over. And then every one says, "What a glorious spring we will have !" looking forward to the time when the downs will be covered with rich, heavy-topped grass amid which will gleam flowers of many colours, dowering the breezes with rare perfume ; seeing in fancy the fields, now a bright green colour, turning to a lighter shade in the days of the flower o' the wheat, ere yet comes the "full corn in the ear, and the fields are ripe unto harvest."

No sooner, therefore, is the Annual Show week over, with its revel and rout, than the meet of the Great Western Steeplechase is near at hand and engrosses all attention. For the last few weeks sheeted horses might be observed being led out for exercise at early morning, or in the evenings leisurely striding along the country roads or steadily making their ways homewards through the streets of the town, their eyes looking large and grotesque through the openings in their hoods, only their brown muzzles visible, or their clean, strong, sinewy limbs, large flint-coloured hoofs, and glistening silky tails showing. Perhaps, while the ground was still soft from the dews of the previous night, you might see a pair of horses swinging along across the open ground, their heads directed for the paddock rails, and you might follow with your eye their flight till they appeared like swallows skimming along over long lines of rails that stood grey and gleaming behind them, ere their heads were again turned for home. There is no denying it, the country breeds jumping strains in their horses, and glories in the fact!

Garry's stables were in a secluded spot, yet near enough to the noise and bustle of the town for all the purposes required. He believed in being adjacent to the turmoil, for the horses when out became accustomed to the sight of people rushing hither and thither, and vehicles of all kinds—spring carts, hawker's vans, bullock drays, and the hundred and one other contrivances which career about the streets of a provincial town—to the sounds of shouting voices and children's screams, the roaring of forges, the clangour of hammer on anvil, the rattle of horses hoofs passing and repassing at all paces—all these things were necessary to a racehorse's education. The appearance of a crowd surging up to the wings of the fences in front of the stand did not afterwards distract his attention, as might otherwise occur. He

could hear the galloping hoofstrokes of compeers, as they went rushing past in their preliminary canters, unmoved, and race down the face-lined railings where stood the shrieking, gesticulating crowd, doing his level best in a close finish without endeavouring to shirk at a critical moment, as horses unaccustomed to a crowd frequently do. This was the sort of education Dangcroux was being subjected to, and it was always his trainer's endeavour whenever an unusual crowd assembled, such as on sale days, to have the roan paraded on the outskirts of it. By such means the horse gradually got rid of the nervous anxiety he had always shown when in company. He had already had several long canters with the throng of his stable companions, but was never then extended, only being sent along by himself, so that he went away from the starting post with the string as coolly as if going for an afternoon canter along the road. He had always been a grand horse to look at, but since having been put into training he had fined down a lot, showing more quality. His long round neck was sleek and glossy; on his sloping shoulders could be traced each powerful muscle, and on his massive square quarters were lined clearly the thews and sinews that gave him such propelling power.

Whenever the coach came into headquarters, Jim Hall would go into the stables to have a look at the horse, for which he had predicted in his own mind a glorious career. He never harassed the trainer with many questions about him. He knew that the horse was well, and that he would hear in quite time enough the stable's opinion of him. The trainer and Jim were great friends, yet they spoke but little to each other. One respected the other's judgment and skill where horses were concerned, and apart from other attractions, it was a pleasure to either to contemplate the external conformation and clearly limned muscles of a horse in the pink of condition.



The list of competitors for the principal event at the meeting was eagerly sought for in the columns of the *Spectator*, on the day after general entry, and as eagerly conned when found. It ran:—Mr. P Ender's b.g. Marquis of Lorne, by King Alfred; Mr. Murray's b.g. Prior, by The Hermit; Mr. Frewer's b.g. Bondo, by Buzzard; Mr. Wilson's r.g. Adonis, by The Thane; Mr. Macpherson's blk.g. Darkie, by Morris Dancer; Mr. O'Malley's b.m. Mavourneen, by Rory O'More; Mr. G. Melville's b.g. Freetrader, by Obscurity; Mr. Western's gr.m. Modesty, by The Hermit; Mr. Oldham's br.g. Cyclone, by High Sheriff; Mr. Dale's b.g. Horizon, by Hermit; Mr. Lowe's blk.g. Trumpeter, by Fugleman; Mr. Seymour's b.g. Prince; Mr. Bowers' b.g. Prince Rupert; Mr. Robertson's gr.g. Banker, by King Alfred; Mr. Fitzgerald's gr.g. Blueskin, by Touchstone colt; Mr. F Melville's rn.g. Dangerous, by Morris Dancer; Mr. J. Harcourt's Happy Jack, by Booby; Mr. Wells' b.g. Vandyke, by Touchstone; Mr. Milson's b.g. Dayspring.

The entry was good, and the quality of the horses excellent. Before the weights appeared, Darkie, Horizon, Modesty, Blueskin, Banker, Vandyke, and Happy Jack were backed, and even afterwards, when the handicapper had allotted each of these 12st. 7lb., the money still went on. Mavourneen had the lightest weight, 10st., and Dangerous the comfortable impost of 10st. 7lb. The remainder of the field carried between 11st. and 12st., and the public seemed satisfied that each horse was left with a chance.

A week before the time appointed for the races the outside competitors for the steeple and hurdle races began to arrive, and jockey boys were in evidence all over the township. Latterly could also be seen the well-known cross-country riders of respectability, viz., Billy Simpson, Jimmy Breen, Tommy Henderson, Charley Mullaley, Billy Morris, W. Harden Charley Ross, W Trainor, and others, who were

well known in the saddle throughout the length and breadth of the colony; besides the local men, many of whom had earned a name for themselves over fences. And at night could be heard the hoarse voices of the bookmakers, offering the odds in the public rooms of the leading hotels. These men had come down from Melbourne and Ballarat to be present at the meeting; for the Western District men were good betters, and never failed to back their stables. There were always a few hundred pounds to be made at this particular gathering, though a thousand or two might be paid away. And what a day the men who played games of chance on the racecourse were sure to have!—the “three card” men; “under and over” dice manipulators; “Who’ll have the lucky number seven?” marble men; “spinning jenny” spielers; men who offered you “three throws for sixpence, and a shilling every time you broke the pipe,” and a host of others who played little games, and found a rich harvest up-country. All these arrived on the eve of the meeting, so that there was no lack of amusement of every kind on the course when the morrow arrived, and the curtain arose on the Great Western racing event of the year. “To the course!” was the cry all the morning, and thitherward wended the community of Westerton and its environs.

“Wherever do all the people come from?” metropolitan visitors were heard to enquire. One might answer, if time will permit: “From the Wimmera, the Mallee Scrub, the Tatiara, the south-east; from Geelong, Ballarat, Melbourne, and everywhere that the lover of a good horse, with leisure to take a holiday, might be located.

There was no end of bustle and clamour on the course—the “I’ll lay the Fee-ild” of the bookmakers blended with “Three to one bar one!” “Two to one Brownie!” “I’ll lay the double, hurdle and steeple,

fifteen to one Brownie and Banker!" "Fifteen to one Magic and Blueskin!" twenty to one Charming and any other!" etc., etc.—whilst the babel of the spiellers, inviting father and son to play at "the fairest game on the course," was incessant. The police might make raid on them at any moment, so it was as well to make hay while the sun shone.

Presently the "all straw" of the Lowan appeared in the straight, after the saddling bell had given "dreadful note of preparation" for the hurdles, Beauchamp in the saddle. Then came Brownie in black and gold, with Sam Harding up; followed by Magic, with little Billy Harden as pilot; Welshman, in the black jacket and red band of a south-east owner; Gaffer Grey, in grey and pink, with W. Morris up; and the beautiful golden chestnut Charming, with Frank Lily to guide him, under the rose and black stripes of the Melvilles. Not a horse in the race but was well supported, saving Charming, which, being a novice at the game, was not entrusted with much money.

The game was afoot when the flag fell to an even start, Magic making the running; Charming lying last, his jockey riding to instructions; next to him ran Welshman, hard held, evidently eager to get away to the front; the others well bunched together. Thus they passed the stand the first time, Magic rattling the hurdles in merry style, as was his wont; Welshman, fighting to get his head, struck hard and unseated his jockey; Charming being left all alone in the rear, yet gradually closing the gap between himself and the others. Round the turn they swept into the straight. Lowan, Brownie, and Gaffer Grey closed on the leader, and a desperate race ensued, when suddenly the white face of the big chestnut was seen to flash up along the rails. They were old generals who were fighting out the finish, and so there was little space left for the youngster to come up inside;

the rider then pulled outside, and whips cracked in real earnest. It was a splendid finish; the chestnut came like a bolt, but the veteran on Brownie just managed to squeeze his mount in first by a head from Charming. There was great excitement over the race, and quite a crowd gathered round the big Captivator colt as he was being rubbed down, recognising in him the material of a great hurdle horse for the races of the future.

The Amateur Hurdle Race was a comfortable win for Yarrowing; Exile running second, with Fred Melville in the saddle.

Then came the luncheon hour. Hampers were unpacked, and ladies descended from the carriages to set forth the good things on snowy table-cloths. Corks began to pop, and bottles to fizz, whilst deft hands with the carvers disjointed the plump limbs of poultry, or distributed sandwiches for the comfort of the inner man.

There was little time then for a quiet chat, so occupied was every one with the business before them—so Fred Melville found; but there was opportunity for an occasional swift glance, and it was taken, as such opportunities usually are. No matter how ardent a lover the average Australian may be, and although he may have looked forward to the meeting with his beloved at some coming race meeting (such gathering being one of the most popular to the dwellers on this side the equator), still he, when the day is over, finds that his attention has been so taken up with racing affairs—if the owner of a horse, in the search for leads, saddle, breastplate, the weighing out, saddling of the steed, the canter, start, the absorbing excitement of the race, the weighing in, etc.—that he has progressed but little in his wooing, though afterwards he may sorrow for the wasted moments, more particularly when a gentle voice upbraids him for neglect.

No sooner was the luncheon hour over, than the bell rang for the saddling for the great event of the day—"The Great Western Steeplechase, Four Miles, over such country as the stewards may direct." The saddling paddock was thronged with horses, nearly all of that class that delight the heart of a man to behold—well bred, powerful, muscular, weight-carrying animals, possessed of activity as well, clean of limb, and gleaming and bright in the coat, for they have been fed on the best of food, cleaned and brushed till not a speck of dust remained on their shining coats, and the arms of their fond grooms ached from their exertions, and besides, rugs, warm and soft, have been strapped over them, and down to their clean hoofs their limbs have been encased in evenly warm bandages. As their rugs are now thrown backward on to the wide, powerful hips, jockeys are visible in all "the pomp and panoply" of racing gear, moving quietly to and from the weighing enclosure, saddle on arm, cool and quiet in their demeanour (a striking contrast to the bustling excitement of the flat race riders, whose race is frequently a sprint—a shaking of arms and legs, and then it is over, though even there judgment comes oftener to the front). With great care the light, long steeplechase saddles are transferred to the broad, bright backs of the steeds, skilfully and cautiously adjusted thereon, fitted as with rule and compasses as to surcingles and breastplates. Then the rug is drawn off the shiny quarters. The pilot takes his seat. All that the trainer can do has been done when the parting injunction has been given, the horse is now out of his hands, the rider he has chosen, after due deliberation, is to do the rest, to carry on the next few minutes of the war, the great final issue for which all the days, weeks and months past of care and attention have been bestowed on the animal, everything done for him during that period of preparation that his trainer could think of. How he

would like to have wings and follow the flight of his favourite, whispering a word of caution here and there to the rider ; but he has not, and must stand with straining eyes watching every stride. It is well if he can trust the pilot to do his level best all through the trial, and better still if the rider remembers that after all the labour and anxiety of the trainer, *he* has now with the same judgment and skill, combined with a cool daring, that the horse's custodian has perhaps not been called upon to show, to do this "four miles, over such leaps, etc."—the end and object of it all, and make or mar by his skill or a foolish blunder, the finish which should crown the work.

It requires a horseman in every sense of the word to do his horse justice over miles of a stiff country—one possessed of an iron nerve, so that he may forget the danger, remembering all through the race the economising of space, power, and pace for the final effort in the run home, and guiding his horse through the intricacies of the race with a cool head and steady hand. There is no small risk in the enterprise, as many a broken limb attests, and at times the ambulance waggon bears a more serious case than a simple fracture, when the position of horse and rider has been reversed, and the motionless jockey is carried unconscious away. The risks are not thought of, perhaps, by the rider, for the pleasure of the

"Measured stride on elastic sward of the steed three parts  
extended,  
Hard held the breath of his nostrils broad with the golden ether  
blended,  
Then the leap, the rise from the springy turf, the rush through  
the buoyant air,  
And the light shock landing, the veriest serf is an emperor then  
and there,"

of which Gordon sang, more than counterbalances them, merely giving additional zest to the sport ; yet the danger is seen and felt by the crowd of onlookers,

who grow hoarse with excitement as the fences are crossed, or cry with horror as, after a heavy fall, the horse rolls over his rider.

Freetrader and Dangerous have been led about together, and under many watchful eyes. They are stripped and prepared for the contest. The roan looks and behaves like an old horse, and moves steadily off under his trainer and rider, when mounted by Henderson. Jack, a fine horseman, rides Freetrader.

At length out of the paddock to the inspiring strains of a quick march played by the old German band, all the competitors for the Great Western have gone, each one doing a quiet preliminary down the straight, lined with eager faces, amid comments and shouts of encouragement from the crowd, as well known and popular horse and rider canter past.

It's "You're the fellow that can manage him, Garry!"

Or, in strong Hibernian accents, "Hooroo for Happy Jack!"

The race card reads as follows, and the names of the riders are added :—

- Mr. McPherson's blk. g. Darkie ; 12st ; crimson jacket, black cap ; W. Marden.
- 1 Mr. Dale's b.g. Horizon ; 12st ; green jacket, gold band, and cap ; J. Wood.
- 2 Mr. Western's Modesty ; 12st ; white jacket, violet sleeves and cap ; W. Simpson.
- 3 Mr. Fitzgerald's Blueskin ; 12st ; all gold ; Owner.
- 4 Mr. Robertson's Banker ; 12st ; black and gold ; scratched.
- 5 Mr. Wells' Vandyke ; 12st ; grey and pink ; Owner.
- 6 Mr. Harcourt's Happy Jack ; 12st ; cream jacket, black band, green cap ; Owner.
- 7 Mr. Murray's Prior ; 12st ; blue jacket, white cap ; scratched.
- 8 Mr. G. Melville's Freetrader ; 11st 7lb ; black jacket, rose band, black cap ; J. Henderson.
- 9 Mr. Milson's Dayspring ; 12st 7lb ; scarlet and black ; scratched.

- 10 Mr. Ender's Marquis of Lorne ; 11st 5lb ; cardinal jacket, blue sleeves and cap ; Rose.
- 11 Mr. Seymour's Prince ; 11st 4lb ; violet and amber ; J. Breen.
- 12 Mr. Lowe's Trumpeter ; 11st 4lb ; all black ; Mullaby.
- 13 Mr. Oldham's Cyclone ; 11st 4lb ; black jacket, white sleeves, red cap ; C. Ross.
- 14 Mr. Frewer's Bondo ; 11st 4lb ; black jacket, magenta sash, and cap ; W. Rayner.
- 15 Mr. F. Melville's Dangerous ; 10st 7lb ; rose and black stripes ; E. Garry.
- 16 Mr. O'Malley's Mavourneen ; 10st ; green jacket and cap ; Owner.

Banker, Prior and Dayspring were scratched. The latter, having won the event twice in succession, was missed from the field, and Prior also was expected to keep up his high reputation, but he did not appear.

As the horses are marshalled at the starting post, at the far end of the straight running, George Melville adjusts his field glasses till he can see clearly by their aid all around the course.

The first fences are two two-railed obstacles, surrounding a stackyard near the school-house ; then further afield a new two-rail gleams red in the sunlight, then down the dip and up the slope flutter the pink flags, past the pound yard, and there gleams another two-railer, and further on still stand the grey rails of the paddock fences, on which flutter the faint light of pink flags. Then in the middle of the paddock, the turning point—a tree guard marked by a large Union Jack—can be discerned, whilst the course can be traced in a northerly direction, over another fence into a cultivation paddock, marked by the dark hue of the lately upturned sods, up a rise, and over another stiff obstacle, into the Manse paddock. All the leaps are on the slope of a rise which surrounds the amphitheatre. Out of the Manse paddock, over two stiff three-rail fences, where is only



a chain road between, then another turn, and a similar fence is left behind, as the horses are expected to turn their faces for home, though still half-a-mile away ; then three more stiff-made fences appear, all of new rails, ere the straight run is reached.

And this course has to be twice negotiated. There is no doubt it requires a good horse and cool rider to safely surmount the obstacles. The horses now drawn up at the posts are accustomed to posts and rails ; this is the species of fence generally met with in the district, and in fact on almost all the steeple-chase courses in Victoria.

With little delay the flag falls, and the field are despatched on their mission. Darkie leads off and pilots the others in and out of the stackyard, all jumping beautifully. Going up to the next obstacle, Trumpeter takes the running, Mavourneen at his heels ; a vision of gleaming silks, and bright shoes flashing, and the band are over without a mishap. Down the dip they go, and you can hear the hoof-beats of the horses, as they strike the bare ground near the pound yard, and again, without a fall, the next fence is flung behind ; then into the paddock they go like a flight of red deer. Now on the outside wing, and anon close in by the flags, and always in the ruck of the running, two horses take the fences steadily side by side ; they are the faultless old Free-trader, and the big roan, Dangerous. The old horse is fulfilling his mission, under the able guidance of his rider, and piloting the inexperienced one over the awkward places as kindly as in a crowded ball-room some elegant dancer steers his partner through the mazes of the dance. Closely are these two watched by our party, well pleased at the tactics of their clever riders.

Necks are craned from every coign of vantage to watch the race, and one hears from the crowd cries of " Bravo ! beautiful ! splendid !" as the horses

swing round the Union Jack, and give a full broad-side view as the colours flash in the sunlight, and the next fence is left behind. Across the ploughed field they gallop in close order, and go into the Manse paddock, over the rails like a flight of birds. Well together they come steadily down to the big double; hoofs rattle the rails a little, but again all are over, leaving no laggard behind. Down the long running they come, flinging the new fences behind them with a merry rataplan of hoofs; faster becomes the pace, for the 'Streperous Cyclone—his red nostrils gleaming over his wide-opened mouth, white foam showing on his breastplate, and a ruddier stain lathering his cheeks, is away with the running. Ross hangs to his head, for they have another round to go; disdaining the curb, and recking not of the line of new red rails in front, the mad tempered horse comes in a stride too close to the fence, and breasting the top rail, turns a somersault in front of the crowd and the field, leaving his rider motionless on the grass, and galloping away.

A shriek from the ladies and a cry of "He's killed!" arises from the onlookers, as the field take the fence in close order, before the injured jockey can be removed. Little Mavourneen, her ears flung forward, takes the lead as the stackyard double is approached the second time, and does the in and out prettily. Darkie comes down at the first obstacle, and takes no further part in the proceedings. At the next, Horizon falls, throwing Wood clear. As the horse was caught by a bystander the rider rapidly regains his seat, whilst the owner watching proceedings from his carriage hard by, ejaculates hurriedly, "He has it yet if he only takes care," but the win will not come off this time, ride as Wood may. Prince comes down heavily at the next fence, for the pace is now fast, and Breen is left lying on the grass, disabled. Frectrader and Dangerous, who have been

lying in the rear, jumping beautifully, close up as the pound yard is reached, and it is a pretty sight to see the horses top the new fence on the rise together. Into the paddocks Mullaby takes them, on Trumpeter, at a rattling pace. And the riders are now seen sitting erect in their saddles, for "it is the second time round, you'll remember." A rattling of rails comes from afar as the field swing over the cultivation fences, and a cry goes up that the Marquis of Lorne is down. He is quickly up and away riderless with the throng, jumping merrily. Over the succeeding fences they race, Mavourneen disputing the lead with the black Trumpeter. Freetrader and his companion run a little wide as the double is approached. At the roadway, Garry caresses the big roan's neck as the horse cocks his ears at the leap. He is regarding it as a great bit of sport, taking every fence in his stride with a steady strain on the bridle. The place before them is an awkward one. Happy Jack, than whom there is no safer fencer in the land, slips in near the pink flag, and pops in and pops out with a rat-tat on the rails, and Bondo, shooting to the front, performs the exploit which has earned for himself a reputation; his first terrific leap lands him out on the roadway, another long stride and he rises at the other obstacle, landing safely in the paddock; but the effort takes too much out of him, for he no longer battles in the van, and Trumpeter there, too, loses the pride of place. Mavourneen was well-nigh down, but still battled bravely on with the others. Dangerous and Freetrader got well over. "Now, Jack," said Garry, "we can close up!" and gradually they drew up to Happy Jack, Modesty, and Vandyke. Out of the paddock leads Happy Jack, and the whip cracks on Mavourneen, but she is done. Blueskin and the grey feel the spurs, as they settle down for the tussle over the last three fences. Freetrader, too, is reminded that they are nearing home. Two of the

three fences are crossed in safety, then Modesty joins issue with the leaders, and shouts go up for "Modesty! Modesty! Blueskin! Happy Jack!" as the several partisans of each horse chime in. Near the last fence the mare gets her head in front and Simpson sits down to ride. A cut of the whip and Freetrader puts in his claim, and his name joins the tumult, as he ranges alongside Happy Jack and Blueskin. "Send him along!" says the trainer, but Freetrader has done his duty and can do no more. For the first time the roan must go alone. Catching sight of the fence his ears are flung forward, and, a length in advance of his old companion, he stands off yards from the timber, and lands on the turf a length behind the mare. Freetrader struggles over dead beat from the pace. Simpson hears the rattle and looks over his shoulder in time to perceive a red roan head creeping up to his mare's quarter. Vigorously he rides, but gradually, amid deafening shouts, the roan head creeps up. It is "Modesty! Modesty!" still, for the post is almost at hand. It is now or never, thinks Garry. Twisting the whip in his right hand, he drives in the spur, and, with a couple of lightning-like bounds, and one single roar of "Dangerous!" the colt wins by a length amid indescribable tumult.

It is a difficult matter to control the roan, so fearful is he of a repetition of the insult of the spur; but steadied at length, he is escorted down the straight to the scales, by old jockey Day, the clerk of the course; his eyes gleam wildly and his ears show their old nervous twitching. He looks as if he would like to bolt, even after that long, severe gallop. "Dismount!" says the Judge, and shortly afterwards an "All right" comes from the scales.

Then three cheers go up for "The Melvilles!" heartily joined in by all there. Around Fred Melville cluster a throng of good fellows, eager to grasp his hand in congratulation for the victory.

Old Modesty, showing the red stains of the spur marks on her white, heaving flanks, comes in for a share of the cheers, and both Garry and Simpson receive an ovation.

It is a long time before the excitement over the race subsides. The name "Dangerous" is in every one's mouth, and a close crowd surround the horse as he is being rubbed down.

When his toilet is finally completed, Fred leads him over to the carriages where are his most intimate friends, in order that Miss Dunsmere may once more caress the gallant horse of which she always speaks a kind word. He is taken for the caress but he heeds it not, for his head is up in the air, and his ears flung forward as his dark eyes look far away over the fields the galloping flight so recently traversed, along the line marked still by the fluttering pink flags, for traces of the merry cavalcade that crushed down the daisies and cut away the green, springy turf ere one and all were left behind, till only the white quarters of the grey stranger were left in front, and she, too, disappeared from view as the white post flashed past. He neighs with pleasure to greet old Freetrader, who limps as he walks, having struck his stifle on the stiff top rail of the last fence, and regains his composure as, side by side with his comrade, he is taken home.

Miss Dunsmere is delighted at the success of the roan. She has won no end of gloves backing her friend. Fred had told her that as long as Freetrader could get a good position near the finish of the race, Dangerous was sure to win; for Garry was confident of the younger one's ability to go the course by the side of his stable companion, and knew well that with his light weight the roan could beat anything in the race for speed, if it came to that.

Mr. Dunsmere, too, joined in praises of the winner. "Did I not tell you, girls, that he resembled Centurion, and where at home was there a better horse

than Centurion with Reggy up?" and the old man's hand went up to his forehead to shade his eyes. Was it from the glare of the afternoon's sunlight, or did a kindly feeling stir in his heart for his brave, outcast, and only son?

## CHAPTER XIII

### RETROGRESSION

It is a long distance back to Great Britain from the spot where the story, or rather the last chapter, closed ; yet great as the space is we must hark back to the place of which a little has been said in an early chapter, that is to London, where Reg Dunsmere was quartered when introduced. It is the mess-room, and in it are Jack Vernon, Vincent Scott (called Snowy from his very blonde appearance), Colonel Dunsmere, Jack Travers, Eric Sturt, Jim Pearson, and some others. They are talking of Reg Dunsmere's sudden disappearance.

"By Jove! Colonel," Jack Travers was saying, "awfully sudden thing Reg's disappearance. Heard all about it this morning at the Criterion. Fellow said he'd been acting most dishonourably. Most shocking affair. Told him my name was Travers—55th. His statement was a d——d lie! Knew Dunsmere well—'straight as a line.' Would cuff any man there who asserted anything to the contrary! Felt as if I'd like to try! Never felt in such a scott in my life! Fellow apologized — 'Didn't know Dunsmere. Heard the story from another fellow. Glad to hear it was untrue. Would not mention it again.' "

"Thank you, Travers," said the Colonel. "The lad is my nephew, as you know, and a wild beggar

at that, at times, I must admit ; but true as steel to a man, and courteous to a woman, or I have not lived my sixty years with open eyes."

"You've said it, sir," said Scott. "Never a truer fellow than Reg. Always the same. Disgusted with a man guilty of a mean action. Cut him dead. Look at Hawtrey and that business over 'Maid-of-the-Mill' at Croxton. Reckoned him up like a flash to his face. Always a gentleman in ladies' society. I don't know how we shall pull along without him. Always to the front in all matters connected with the Regiment when a beginning was necessary, and very near the lead when the finish arrived."—"Sure to land square on his feet wherever he goes."—"Too much pluck to go down in the mud."—"Sincerely hope he'll be back again with us before long."—So spoke they almost in one breath, and certainly with one accord.

"Well, lads, Vernon here, and myself, went down to see him when we heard about the trouble, and found him packing up in a hurry. Made up his mind to clear straight out. Said he'd been foolish, and it was better to leave. Terribly cut up because his Governor cut him off,—wouldn't hear of his calling him father again, and so on. Old Cashmere had been up there with the devil of a story, enough to turn a father's head grey. Anyway, Reg was off. Horses to be sold next Saturday. Said to bid you men good-bye. Hoped you'd still have a good word to say for him as he had not disgraced the old Regiment yet! However, to cut it short, he's off for Australia by to-morrow's boat, and prefers going away on the quiet."

"Know Mrs. Cashmere well," said another. "She was one of the Vincent girls. No end of a beauty. Terribly fine looking woman now. Thought all along she was a bit sweet on Reg. Noticed her at the ball the other night. She wore a scowl like a



thunder-cloud. Thought there was something up. By-the-way, you remember Jack Mytton and Con Bingham had no end of a row over her two years ago."

"We won't say anything about the lady, lads! Things may not look so bad for Reg bye-and-bye. The affair is inexplicable to me, and the boy is as silent as the grave. We must await the issue of events."

Not only in the house of Dunsmere was there sorrow when news of the brother's departure for an indefinite period without bidding good-bye was made known, but also at Farnham—Judge Vernon's residence—when Jack Vernon made known to his sister, in accordance with Reg's wish, the circumstances which led him to bid a long adieu. Her face was deathly pale, and her lips twitched, and when Vernon added "that he believed in Dunsmere as he never believed in any man, and would continue to do so till Dunsmere told him that he was no longer worthy of trust," she burst into a passionate fit of weeping that could not be controlled, and it was many a day before that fair young face looked cheerful again.

The conversation before referred to took place the day prior to Dunsmere's departure from the old land, and although it is now three years since that time, his old friends have not heard a word from him.

A year after the occurrence which made his son an alien, Mr. Dunsmere, hearing good accounts of the climate of Australia from some of the retired squatters who were rusticating at Cheltenham, thought that he would take a voyage over with his daughters. He did not feel very strong himself, and he was afraid that the London fogs did not agree very well with Miss Dunsmere. (Ah! old man; speak out the thoughts that are in your heart! and say that there is another and a stronger magnet drawing you towards the land of the Southern Cross,

make what excuses you may! Out of the mists which gather on the far horizon, across the foam-flecked waters of the great sea, rises up to the exorcism of your dreams a fair face, sad with the burden of outcast that your own hasty words have stamped thereon. Ay! in these same dreams oftentimes since you have in the words of another father, whose history has been handed down for ages, "Ran and fell upon his neck and embraced him.") He did so, and, acting upon advice from an old friend, visited the western district of Victoria, and liking the country, the climate, and the people, decided to settle there away from the hurry and bustle, the fogs and smoke of the great city, purchasing the very comfortable estate of The Gums, and was there happily domiciled when the story opened.

Meeting his colonel in the mess-room one day, Scott said, after enquiring for tidings of Reg only to hear as usual "Not a word since, Scott. Not a word!"—

"Queer thing this about Mrs. Cashmere! Have you heard? Old Cash in a terrible state. Going to shoot somebody. Anybody with the facings on! Ultimately fell down in a fit. Wife off with Con Bingham—Irish Regiment. Out hunting on Wednesday on one of Con's horses—Cushla-Ma-Chree, I believe. Terrible fine rider you know she is, and, by Jove! they galloped straight away. Con's wild devil, ride over anything. Both disappeared. Went straight out into the sea I suppose. Hope they got a boat. Anyhow, never came back!"

"You don't say so, Scott! By Jove! I'm sorry for poor Cashmere. He doted on his wife; thought her perfection personified—Roman Claudia in fact. It's a great blow to him."

"Looks now, sir, as if she might have been acting a little in that affair of Reg's. Man never likes to say anything about an old flame," said Scott, "no

matter how hard she is on him, or one of our fellows could have told Cashmere something that would have opened his eyes, while Reg was packing up. However, she's gone now, and maybe that other affair will be put straight before long."

"Certainly, Scott ; this move is in the lad's favour. But it's a terrible thing when the consequences are considered."

"Anyhow, sir, Jack Vernon is going out to Australia next week to try a change of climate for his sister's sake. They say she's in a decline. Miss Vernon's never been the same since Reg left. Vernon swears that he'll hunt the length and breadth of Australia before he comes back (if Miss Vernon's health improves) till he gets a grip of the old boy's hand again. This little bit of news will be a crumb of comfort to him ; for whatever public feeling may have been then, it must change its tune considerably after this event. Jack's no blockhead, sir. When he gets on the track of anything he'll stick to it in his quiet, determined way, till it runs out ; and, depend upon it, Jack will give the 'whoo whoop' before long."

"I will certainly call upon Vernon, and without delay. He applied for leave, and it was granted, last week. My brother Edward—Reg's father—is now settled in Australia, and is awfully pleased with the country. He's turned squatter, or something of that kind ; regular country farmer. Breeds horses and cattle, and rides to the hounds. You'd scarcely believe it ! they seem to be thoroughly civilized, even where he is, some hundreds of miles from Melbourne. Move about just as we do—railways, coaches, carriages, etc. Never heard my brother speak about the blacks. He reckons the country is as fertile as Great Britain, and the climate simply perfection. Fancy having beautiful sunshine even in the depth of winter ! By Jove ! it strikes me as just the place

for a person suffering from Miss Vernon's complaint. I'll give Jack an introduction to my brother. Good! capital! How pleased the girls will be to know each other. Reggy's sister! Reggy's sweetheart! Gad! never thought of the thing before. I'll do it at once. Ta, ta, Scott; ta, ta." And the worthy old gentleman, smiling to himself, as he built "castles in Spain" for his dearest friends, hurried off to put his idea into effect.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THROUGH HONOUR AND DISHONOUR

AFTER the steeplechase meeting a number of ladies with their cavaliers, who had come from stations and towns at a considerable distance from the trysting place, in order to make their outing as enjoyable as possible, visited their friends in the neighbourhood, staying a few days at each station, thus making their return by slow degrees. Consequently the succeeding weeks were periods of great enjoyment to those who were able to take the world easily. There were driving parties and picnics, riding parties and kangaroo hunts with those fleet-footed and courageous animals the kangaroo dogs. There was also a great meet of the hounds the day after the steeplechase. A number of visitors viewed the meet from their carriages, and saw a good deal of the run. After the steeplechase the populace all seemed cross-country mad, and consequently a greater number than usual of "brown coats" took a part in the run, mostly on unprepared horses, falls as a consequence being frequent, and baulks of no unusual occurrence. Still there were some horses, rough in the coat, but splendidly ridden, that kept well with the hunt throughout; and indeed in every district of Victoria where a meet of the hounds takes place there will be found such animals, and no scarcity of men to steer them; for

the colonial youth takes to cross-country work as naturally as a duck to water, a statement which may be verified any day of the week by observing him in the bush townships in his petticoat days, astride of a stick, switch in hand, taking famous leaps to his own immense delectation.

George Melville, on Thunderbolt, was in his accustomed place during the run, and Fred found an excuse for riding Gladiator beside Mr. and Miss Dunsmere (mounted respectively on the big grey and The Druid), just within comfortable distance of the hounds, by saying that he wished to save his favourite for the usual Saturday's run, when a stag was to be unharboured.

Mr. Dunsmere, when the events of the recent run transpired, deprecated his daughter's having taken such a forward position throughout the chase, though inwardly pleased that she had shown so much courage and skill; and he spoke of the run with no little pride. However, he would not accept of Melville's offer to act again as pilot, preferring his daughter's society himself. During the gallop he said, "And it is doubtful if Miss Dunsmere would herself have consented if referred to." There were three ladies who went through the run admirably. Two were visitors from the metropolis, who had come down for the steeplechase week. They were staying with the Blythes, and Miss Blythe, on Merrimac, showed them how the timber could be crossed by the hunt's lady riders. Fred found that whatever detriment pace possessed for the old gentleman, timber had none, the stiffest rails being disposed of by the big grey as if they were ordinary brush fences, and the game little Druid made no mistakes whatever the nature of the obstacle. He would have liked to go skimming along "by down and by dell and by fell and by flat" with the hounds, but the time had not yet come when he was to have his

wish gratified in that respect, so he conquered the inclination, and showed his superfluous energy by leaping a foot over everything.

It was pretty to watch the hounds away on the right skimming along over the green pastures, a black horse always a little wide of them, and near at hand the natty grey of the huntsman, while two light weights (the whips) raced on the skirts of the pack like shadows, the field being spread over half a mile of country, though the regular followers of the hunt were well together. There were broken rails to mend next day, and more than one coat showed the green stain of a spill on the grass, but nothing serious resulted from the many falls that occurred. And what a pleasant ride that was homewards through the long aisles of the forest, where the green boughs hung from the old gum trees till they brushed your face with leaf and blossom, while innumerable parrots winged swiftly their tortuous course among the trees with varied and melodious whistling, starting suddenly from the green umbrage of honeysuckles with their golden cones laden with sweetness—the air fragrant with the smell of honeysuckle and wattle-blossom, and the earth carpeted with luscious grass and crisp crimson and gold leaves for the hoofs of the horses.

Mr. Dunsmore, in a deep reverie, rode silently on ahead—

“Did he think of each fresh year of fresh grief the herald,  
Of lids that are sunken, and locks that are grey ;  
Of Alice who bolted with Brian Fitzgerald ;  
Of Rupert, his first born, dishonoured by play ?”

It was well that his whole attention was engrossed with the subject of his thoughts, for could he have looked over his shoulder he would certainly have dusted his eye-glass with wonderment, preparatory to again adjusting it to his eye. The two good

horses behind were stepping in perfect unison, with reins flapping loosely on their sleek necks, while a soft hand rested in a strong palm that had been hardened by labour and browned by the fierce sun of Northern Queensland. Fred's neglect at the Show Ball had long since been pardoned, for he had made a clean breast of his weakness; and his flying visits on Race day, viewed in the light of extenuating circumstances, were now forgiven in consideration of a promise not to offend again. In her heart, too, Miss Dunsmere had wished that she could have gone into the saddling paddock when the powerful, fleet-looking, sleek-conditioned roan was being prepared for the fray, in order that she might have whispered to him a full pardon for his escapade of weeks ago; for it had given him a new owner very much after her own heart, and to her the closest friend she had ever known, though it seemed a little hard that Fred should have had so little time then to spare for her, when others seemed to have plenty of opportunity. He was saying as they rode quietly along: "How pleasant it would be to live always in Victoria. Only a few months ago I was thinking how hard it was to leave Queensland. We had such lively times over there. The cattle kept us going, mustering and drafting. There were colts to break and good horses to ride, and, out bush, the blacks kept us constantly on the *qui vive*. One didn't know the hour they'd break out, and give cattle and all a turn; and now I can scarcely understand why that wild life has lost its charm for me. I feel now as if I cannot leave home at all."

"Well Fred, dear, you have such a pleasant home at Rosebrook, and a kindly fond mother to make it comfortable for you, besides all the pleasures that a country life can afford. Mr. Melville and yourself are, and have been always, so popular here, that I can quite understand your dislike to going back



again to the bush. I do hope you will not go for a long time to come."

"Ah! Nelly, you have said truly about the dear old home; but you have omitted to mention the main attraction that binds me here. It is yourself, darling! I must go soon though. Do you think, Nelly, that you can love me when I am absent, divided from you by hundreds of leagues of meadow and field, plain and forest; hidden from sight far beyond the horizon yonder; ay! even if everything should change: through poverty, through sickness, through good and bad report, through honour and dishonour; for at the thought of leaving you life seems to grow darker, and a shadow hovers over me that I cannot dispel. It is as if a sombre curtain were hung over the to-morrow, and that if it were thrust aside there would be thick darkness beyond. The future used to look so bright. I could, in fancy, picture the years to come, seeing everything prosperous, the wild places made habitable, and all the dear old faces around me untouched by the withering finger of time, always wearing the glad smiles of the old years, nor entered sorrow or death into the kingdom of my creation, though both seem to hover near me on heavy wings now."

"Do not say that, Fred! It seems as if I could not part from you, but would willingly follow you to the end of the world. All seems so desolate when you are away. I am always thinking about you, and longing to see you. It is pleasant to think that you too think of me sometimes. I would keep you if I could; it is hard to think that you are going away. You will always be the same to me. I shall still see you as I have seen you during the last few months—kind, thoughtful, courageous, and honourable; and if my love grew at each meeting, then it will still grow in your absence. Though you will not be with me, yet will your voice speak to me in words that

my soul's creative imagery will put into your tones, and in my heart my thoughts will give the answer, No, Fred; if I dream of you it is always in the fairest light that you appear; even as to Latmos, in that beautiful painting we both spoke of once, came the divinely limned face of his beloved as the spirit of a dream." For the first time their lips met in a fond kiss, and the handclasp tightened, to ratify the bond—"Through honour and dishonour."

## CHAPTER XV

### IN THE FAR NORTH

OUT to the westward of Port Royal, on the tablelands, lies the well-known station of Lake Melville, carrying some thousands of good cattle under the able superintendence of Jimmy Don, in his master's absence.

Don heard regularly from his friend Fred Melville, long, chatty letters, giving him all the news from old Victoria — telling of the horses and hounds, the meetings of the hunt, their runs, the horses he rode, and those that followed ; for Don knew aforetime every thoroughbred horse in the district. He had heard all about the roan colt Dangerous, till he fancied that he knew him by sight ; at any rate, he had drawn a mental picture of him, in which there were no imperfections ; and he shared in his master's enthusiasm over the good horse's merits. He had sent down a fiver to be invested on the roan, on the strength of his training performances, and heard with much pleasure the tidings of the Morris Dancer horse's victory in the Great Western. He followed eagerly the account of the race in the local paper which had been forwarded to him, for he knew every fence, and could tell what the take-off was like into each paddock. He had scrambled through the old fences as a boy, and later on, mounted on the veteran

Rory O'More, had rattled the top rails of the paddock fences right merrily, where—

“The tough, stringy bark, that invites us to lark  
With impunity may not be broken.”

Others of the horses, too, were familiar to him, and their riders had always appeared as “loyal knights” in the pages of his memory. The men in the station got a glass of whisky all round to drink success to Dangerous, and a repetition if he won. They were right glad to hear of the victory, for a good win “between the flags” pleased them better than if the master had pulled off the cup. They had learned to respect him for his quiet, gentlemanly manner, as well as for his skill on horseback. Many a long gallop they had had together on mustering days, when wheeling the wild scrub cattle, and many a tough skirmish with the blacks, when the latter had been spearing the herd. He had shared their hardships in flood-time, when they had to shift the stock out to higher ground, swimming creeks and warramboles, and in days of drought-time they had fought the long fight against death, side by side. Wherever they were afterwards, they always carried with them a good word for the master.

Don, too, had heard of the imprisonment and subsequent trial of his old schoolmate, now the Rev. James Mostyn. He knew the principal witness, Blackmore, well, having often seen him travelling through the western district with stock; and it was only about a year ago that he had come out to Queensland with a mob of cattle, selling small lots as he came along, if prices were advantageous. Don had wondered at the owners trusting him to do this; but as the man had a good name as a drover, and the practice was sometimes resorted to, as in a mob of store cattle certain animals, which would otherwise only bring store prices, though fat, if sold with the

mob, could be disposed of advantageously here and there *en route*, it seemed as if he was carrying out instructions. The cattle were from the Victorian border, and bought by Mr. Fred Melville, who made a flying visit thither to purchase, returning promptly to the station thereafter.

When Jimmy Don read all the evidence in the papers forwarded him, he immediately connected Blackmore with the attempt on Dalgleish's life, believing that he had fired the shot and stepped hurriedly aside on hearing the approach of the clergyman's horse. He would like to have a few minutes on the quiet with that cunning rascal ; for Jimmy could box, and was as game as a forrester kangaroo. He knew Patsy O'Malley well as a boy, and had always liked him. Pat and he had had many a tough mill, just to see who was best ; and until Don learned how to keep out of the way (having received a little instruction on the quiet from an old bullocky, who had been a pugilist in his day), Patsy's blind rush and furious rain of blows made it very unsettled for him. They had hunted kangaroo together, and ridden their horses over all kinds of fences, when the question was not what the horse could accomplish, but what height the rider could sit over. As he read then his old boy friend's evidence, he could not refrain from saying, "Bravo, Patsy !" well pleased that Pat's early manhood was bearing out the promise of rectitude that was shown in the straightforwardness of the boy. He was glad to note also that the old rival had gone through the big race so creditably on a mare of his own breeding and training. It had been the height of their ambition, when joining in the merry scampers out in the bush, to ride in the Great Western Steeplechase ; and now Patsy had done so, and although Don had not yet got so far as a horseman, still the boyhood enthusiasm for riding across country was with him still.

He also knew Dan O'Malley, the elder brother, now one of the best stockmen in the back country, and a trusted drover on Heywood Downs station, adjoining the property of the Mostyns. Dan was grown up before Don left school, but his impression of him was, that he was a wild fellow, given to drink and dissipation ; always ready to fight, yet a wonderful hand on horseback, ready at a moment's notice to ride anything over any place that a horse could jump or fall over ; yet he had done many a kindly action in cases of sickness or accident, so that there were none but had a kindly word for the wild lad. Dan never went to Victoria but he took a run home to see his sister Kate. He may have been of rough and surly expression to chance acquaintances, but to Kate he was kindly, thoughtful and gentle ; she was to him the living embodiment of the generous, sweet-tempered, loving mother he remembered in his early boyhood.

Don had heard further of the Rev. Mostyn's acquittal of the charge brought against him, and his resignation of the Pastorate of the Glenelg, and further of his having set out for Heywood Downs, and was glad to hear that they were to have the pleasure of his society out back ; for next to Fred and George Melville the young clergyman ranked as a man in Don's estimation.

The Downs is a splendid run, well watered, and carrying fifteen thousand head of good cattle. Having been neighbours in the western district of Victoria, the owners of the two stations were very friendly, and their social intercourse took away a great part of the apparent solitude of the surroundings. The men employed on the stations frequently met together when there was a big muster, and occasionally in the slack times other station hands would join in and arrange for a race meeting. The animals contesting the events were frequently of high lineage, the sires used

out there being selected from the best quality and purest blood, and there were usually a few thoroughbred mares kept to breed from. Jimmy Don had just returned from such a meeting when the news of Mostyn's projected arrival reached him. He had taken over to The Downs three of the best horses they could muster (of Panic blood) outside of those which Fred Melville kept for himself, two for the jumping race—a rough kind of cross-country event, more of a steeplechase than a hurdle race, and more dangerous than either, for the leaps consisted of heavy long green spars thrown into forked posts; there was no breaking through them, and too much daylight underneath the rails to give any other than a very clever horse a chance of showing himself to advantage over them. Jimmy knew that Dan O'Malley would be sure to have something hard to beat, and so it proved, for Ballyrogan was thoroughbred; and when in the race he and Sluggard, Don's horse, had got everything else beaten and were fighting out a desperate finish, an outsider, in the shape of Cottesmore, which had been picked out of a mob and broken in by "Long Jack," head man at Bael Bael, an out-station belonging to Heywood Downs, swooped down upon them in the last few strides and beat them both, to their no small discomfiture, Jack handling his mount in real good form. Next morning Sluggard was missing, and Cottesmore was found in the paddock, with a rough rider's saddle and bridle on; the reins were broken. The colt could buck like a demon, and Jack smiled to himself as he pictured the surprise of the stranger who had mounted him, when he discovered the nature of the animal he bestrode. The black boys quickly discovered traces of the onset out on the plain, some little distance away from the cattle yard, where the horses had been caught. The colt had gone into figures properly, cutting up the turf with his hoofs in zig-zag bounds. A broken stirrup

leather and an indentation in the sand showed where the horse thief had been discomfited. "By gum, that fella colt make him sit up, ha! ha!" and the boys grinned and laughed together as they pictured the affair.

It was too late when the horses were missed to follow the tracks far. It was ascertained, however, that four other horses were in waiting in the scrub, and that when Sluggard was captured he joined that force; and, further, that the lot had gone off at a strong pace in a westerly direction. Jim sent particulars of his loss to the Police Station, and received a note from Inspector Ayre in reply, to say that all police stations would be at once advised of the matter, but that he had just heard of further depredations on Mitchell Downs, and believed there was a regular gang of horse thieves about. Besides, information was to hand that Colter's Half Way Hotel had been stuck up, and two revolvers with ammunition taken therefrom. He advised all station managers in the district to be careful of harbouring suspicious characters, and trusted that the earliest information possible would be given to the police, should anything further transpire. He was then taking the route for the scene of the latest outbreak.

George and Norman Mostyn, who lived on Heywood Downs, sent messages round to their neighbours, advising them of Don's loss and the inspector's advice, with full particulars of the horse Sluggard; and Jimmy himself vowed vengeance against the thieves for taking his favourite—a horse for which he had formed great expectations.

Such was the state of things when their youngest brother James, the clergyman, of whom we have written, arrived from Victoria. Both brothers were fond of him; he had been such a quiet, steady-going chap, and yet, when any extra effort was required, they always found Jim equal to it. They were not



astonished when, at the end of his college course, he signified his intention of studying for the Church. His was one of those refined, sensitive, imaginative temperaments that see the full beauty of the Christian religion, and shudder at the grossness of the creeds of Mammon and Moloch. They left him to his own judgment. He was independent through the will of his late father, and as he took high honours as a collegian, it was evident that he knew what was the best course to pursue. They had heard from time to time of his success and popularity as a preacher, and also of his manly bearing, which gave them great pleasure. They would have been at his side during the trial. He had written imploring them not to think of coming down ; he was sure of acquittal, and had no lack of friends to stand beside him. He would, however, after the event, go up to Heywood Downs. They knew that George and Fred Melville would do all they could for him, for they never for a moment doubted Jim's integrity.

He had a warm reception from each on arrival, and Don, too, had joined the circle to give the new comer cordial greeting. Mostyn, therefore, found himself comfortably installed at Heywood Downs, with the best of horses to ride, and a roving commission to do as he chose, which they quickly found was, by his translation, to do whatever work was being done amongst the stock. And there his early training in bushcraft stood him in good stead. They had given him as guide a smart black boy, and an introduction to Long Jack at Bael Bael, where he was delighted with the picturesque homestead near the wide, clear lake, which gave it its name. He found in Jack a man of education and refinement, such as one occasionally meets with on some lone outpost in the wild regions, and enjoyed his society, doing some smart work after the outlying mobs of cattle, which performances on the part of a clergyman, with all the

gentle appearance of a new chum, fairly astonished Jack. The blacks, too, manifested a real dread of the new arrival; some of the dusky hangers-on on the outskirts had seen him fire from his revolver at an old hat, stuck on a whitewood tree at one hundred paces, and on inspecting the object curiously afterwards, they found the six holes in the crown, and saw where the bullets had entered the wood. That was enough for them. There was no likelihood of any nigger in the district lying in wait for him—a proceeding which was sometimes attempted by the most daring with others.

They were good mates, the clergyman and the stockman, though their conversations were brief enough, both being naturally reserved; and it was not long before James Mostyn became as proficient in bushcraft as many a man who had spent years in acquiring the knowledge, and was of great assistance to the brothers, managing that large tract of country, in many ways. For his own reasons, he always contrived to pass the beginning of the week with them at the head station.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A THUNDERCLAP

LIFE ran along in its usual pleasant groove at Rosebrook during the days following the Great Western. Fred Melville was a regular visitor at The Gums. He had told Mr. Dunsmere how matters stood, and the old gentleman had shaken him warmly by the hand. "She is the only one left to me now, Melville, but there is no one to whom I would more readily give her, lad! You are a son after my own heart;" and the white-bearded face assumed a sad expression.

Mrs. Melville, too, the courtly old lady, was very much pleased at the choice her son had made, and took the very earliest opportunity of calling at The Gums.

"You are to take away from me my son, Nelly, but he is bringing to me a daughter of whom I am very proud," said she, kissing Miss Dunsmere's cheek. "We have been always the most intimate of friends since your coming to The Gums, Mr. Dunsmere, and I am most happy to think that there will yet be a stronger bond between the two families. Fred has always been a most dutiful and loving son to me, and I am sure that I will have a most powerful ally in you, Nelly, in the endeavour to persuade him to remain with us, though I fear for some little time his duties will take him to Queensland."

"You may be sure, Mrs. Melville, that I will use

my best arguments to that end, although if duty called I would go with him to the remotest part of the world, but for your sake I know he would do anything that was in his power."

"Ah, Nelly! you sly little puss, I fancy you and he have arranged it all long ago."

"No, papa dear. I leave everything in his hands; I have such faith in him to do what is best."

"Well said, my dear girl; but then you know me too. Mrs. Melville and myself would like to have you both near us, where you could still be children to the parents who are now growing old, but none the less fond of you both."

"Very well said, Mr. Dunsmere! Whatever new ties our children may form, they are to us our loved ones still. It seems to me but a few days ago that Fred started for those far lands first, going away with a laugh and a song on his lips, as if he was just going across the fields to visit a neighbour; the very idea of the dangers and difficulties that would require to be faced apparently making the enterprise the more pleasant. I will not forget my anxiety when for weeks there were no tidings of him, and then when at last they were received, the letters were so cheering and bright. He never spoke of the drawbacks of that perilous life—the flooded rivers he had to swim, the terrible onslaughts of savage blacks, or of the privations that had to be endured. It seemed as if he was writing from some well-appointed study on a velvet or morocco case, far removed from discomfort, and quite from fear of evil. He has since told me, with tears of laughter in his eyes, that he frequently wrote by the blaze of a breeze-freshened camp fire, on the bottom of an upturned common bucket! And now that affairs are in good order on the station, and he has so far safely come through the dangers, we have heard of them all. I noticed a terrible scar on the top of his head; it was caused by a black fellow's

weapon ere he was rescued by that gallant little gentleman, his manager, James Don. Yes, Mr. Dunsmere, you are right, the young ones must not forget that our love for them lasts through life, and that our dearest hope is that they may still love us, and be near at hand to guide us when with tottering steps our feet descend the dark valley."

Affairs went along in their usual smooth, prosperous manner in the district during the early winter. There were the usual weekly sales of stock to be attended by the men, an arrangement which usually brought many together who followed pastoral pursuits. There were the regular weekly meetings of the hunt to engross the attention of hunting men. And during all this time Fred Melville was taking his fill of the joys of civilised life, for he could appreciate it after all the hardships he had gone through. Racing matters were quiet, although the trainers were busy with their several charges. Garry still had the big roan in string work, for he was weighted in the Warrnambool Grand National Steeplechase, at eleven stone seven pounds, and the race looked almost a certainty for him if he ran kindly amongst the strange horses. As an education, he was galloped quietly with some other string. For a little time after his win he was inclined to rush his fences, fearing the spurs; but he was now forgetting that indignity and showing wonderful form, quite good enough to win a big handicap on the flat. Charming, too, had been let into the hurdle race at eleven stone and was sure to run forward. Gladiator, Thunderbolt and Free-trader were now in the station stables kept in training for the hunting season, and the "king of all the lot," as George Melville was wont to term him, the powerful Mameluke, had a box all to himself, and was shining in the coat like a star. The young minister had told George when Mameluke went over to his stables, brought there at Melville's express command,

for the sake of his owner, and for his own sterling worth, "If you *will* take him, George, do not allow him to eat the bread of idleness ; put the saddle on him whenever you choose, and kindly see that he has a romp occasionally, it will do him good, and he likes it."

"Certainly, Jim. I will see that the big fellow earns his oats if that is all that troubles you. I know what you wish, even to keeping him stainless of the silken jacket, that he would carry with honour, for the sake of your prejudices against racing. He has earned a season of rest right well, but he shall not be allowed to run to seed, so that he may be fit for your bee-line expeditions on your return."

His master was now gone to far fields, and was greatly missed by more than his friends the Melvilles.

At the Priory Mrs. Dalgleish attended to the duties devolving upon her, and carefully nursed the invalid, for Dalgleish improved slowly, but was surely regaining his health.

The shooting affray, as a subject for discourse, had not yet blown over ; people, when the affair was mentioned, still discussed it in all its phases, and many were the opinions expressed as to its authorship. Blackmore was unanimously denounced as its perpetrator, although there seemed no direct evidence against him, and, in fact, no one could even assign a motive for his so acting. It was with the greatest regret that all spoke of the heavy burden that their young clergyman had been made to bear in the matter. All classes of the community missed him ; even the sporting men liked to see his firm erect seat on the big powerful horse, and many were the stories circulated concerning the pair, some of them muchly exaggerated, but yet with a flavour of truth that made them appear probable, if almost impossible. One averred that he had seen the Reverend go in and out of the poundyard on the big bay, "like a

bird," in the dim red light of early dawn, and it probably was a bird skimming along he had seen, for no living animal had as yet got over those rails (saving a bullock which, by some manner of means, climbed up the rails, balancing for a second on the top, and then falling over outside to the consternation of some of the town youngsters who were teasing him through the fence). Another had seen horse and rider "come down over the rocks forninst ye by the sheep thrack, and lep the stone wall on the stape shlope whin Rafferty's lad, beyant, was bitten by a shnake, and he came for the docthor." This was one of the correct stories in circulation. The children all missed him, for he was always at the head of anything that had for its object their pleasure or comfort. And many a half holiday they had to thank him for, when the schools showed excellent results on his examination thereof. The men liked him for his straightforward manner, general knowledge and readiness to assist in any good work that was going forward, for being sound though sparing of advice, and above all for his gentle manliness; and the women for his deference and courtesy to them. Those who went, came away after hearing his sermons, feeling better, and with something to think over in a new light to what they had hitherto, in most cases, regarded it; and all longed to see him going to and fro amongst them again. It did not matter what denomination people belonged to, if they needed help he was ready to give it. He and the Roman Catholic clergyman had been hand in glove, for Father Derry was a Christian in every sense of the word, and as a man, after his own heart. In answer to one of his parishioners, Father Derry had said, "Yes, certainly, I am pleased that Mr. Mostyn has been here before me. Ye'll learn no evil from him, and it's great good he's doing. Isn't his hand in his pocket always? Besides, aren't his own people

generous and hospitable to me? He will give you a lesson in fair dealing and honourable conduct by his conversation and precept, and he'll tell you to believe in God. What more could I do?"

There were none but were united in condemnation of the villain who, by his treacherous action, had caused such a loss to their community. So still ran opinions when, like a thunderclap, came the announcement that Fred Melville had been arrested for cattle stealing. There could be no doubt about his detention.

While the Melvilles were seated at early breakfast that morning, before starting out back on the run to the drafting yards, a few days prior to the date fixed by Fred for his departure to the far lands again, Inspector Champley had called, putting his horse in the stable as was his wont, and walking up to the breakfast room. Champley was a frequent and welcome visitor at all times. He was a favourite with the brothers from his gentlemanly bearing, and prowess in every department of sport—a good boxer, crack pistol shot, and at home on horseback, always riding a good one.

"Glad to see you, old man. Just in time for breakfast. Been moonlighting horse thieves again?"

"Thought I would be up in time for breakfast if I came without mine. You fellows are such early birds, so I'll join you with pleasure."

George rang the bell for another cup and saucer.

"They say, 'business first and pleasure afterwards.' No, I'll depart from the rule and honour it in the breach. We may as well have one more jolly meal together. It always does a fellow good to break his fast here. But I feel awfully like Judas Iscariot. No! boys! I can't do it, break bread first and turn traitor afterwards," said Champley, putting down his knife and fork. "Fact is, old Jeffrey of Millewa has been losing some of those crack Angus cattle of his,



and having traced them out into Queensland, Fred, old boy! he is stupid enough to connect you with the taking of them out there as a speculation in that mob of yours, and by God! he has issued a warrant for your arrest, and I have come up to serve it on you. Dirty business, old chap! but I'd sooner do it than entrust the work to any of the men."

Fred arose from his seat. "You don't say so, Champley. It's one of those infernal jokes of yours?"

"No, no, Fred, it's no joke; more's the pity! There's the parchment properly drawn up and signed."

For a moment the brothers looked at each other, then burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"There's no doubt about the genuineness of the affair, George," said Fred, as they both sat down again, "but the joke's too good! Arrested for stealing cattle! Heavens!" and his brow grew dark as a thought struck him. What would Miss Dunsmere think?

"Still take your coffee without milk, Champley? Better try some of this goat's lacteal fluid, it gives coffee the proper twang."

"I suppose you won't come out to the yards this morning, Fred. Pressing engagement, eh?" but he stopped joking when he remarked Fred's serious face as he looked towards his mother's rooms, and he too could guess what the tidings would mean for her.

"Poor Jim Mostyn first. Now my turn. Look out for yourself, George, and you too, Champley. I suppose you'll be serving a warrant on yourself one of these fine mornings. When you do, old chap, come up to Rosebrook, and have breakfast. Always a bone and a blanket for you up here, you know. By Jove! though, we may all be breakfasting at one of Her Majesty's tables by that time if this goes on."

They could make nothing out about the affair, or

what led to the issuing of the warrant, further than what Champley had said *re* Jeffrey's action, and the instruction to arrest Blackmore as an accomplice, which somewhat explained the matter.

"I don't like the company I'm in," said Fred. "It is some extenuation of an offence to have sinned in good company, but even that crumb of comfort is denied *me*! It's that black devil, again, George, by all that's holy! However, I suppose I must make the best of it. I will thank you, Champley, if you will ride with me as far as The Gums, when our affairs are settled at home."

"Anything that you wish to do, concurrent with my duty, will be permitted, Fred, you may rest assured. When you have made your arrangements, let me know, and I shall be at your service."

There was not a great deal of business to settle between the brothers. George Melville was a good business man, so that affairs were never allowed to stand unsettled for any length of time. But the saddest thing of all was the broaching of the subject to the white-haired mother. Mrs. Melville bore up well, merely saying, "My dear boy, it is preposterous that you should be deemed capable of such guilt. I have not the slightest fear for you. Everything will be speedily put right. But I feel that our dear girl, Nelly, will be deeply grieved. I will drive over this afternoon and comfort her as well as I can. Thank you, for your courtesy, Mr. Champley, in acting so considerately towards my son."

"Don't mention it, Mrs. Melville. I would stake my life on the simple statement of either, without the *parole d'honneur*. Depend upon it, madame, there is a snake in the grass, somewhere, and after the manner of that reptile, it has managed to use its fangs without warning."

## CHAPTER XVII

### UNDER A CLOUD

PEOPLE who had resided in Westerton since it was founded, had always found it a steady going quiet place, in which the police had had very little to do beyond running down an occasional horse thief, who had been attracted thither by the fame of its thoroughbred horses. There were the usual petty court cases which are to be found in all communities, but there had been a total absence of crime in the neighbourhood all these years ; and now, within the space of a few weeks, there was Mr. Dalgleish shot at and grievously wounded ; Mr. Mostyn, their clergyman, arrested and tried for the charge ; and now Mr. Fred Melville, whom they had known from his youth up, was arrested for cattle stealing. When, however, they heard that Blackmore was wanted as an accomplice, all thought they saw through the matter clearly. "Yes, it was all that black scoundrel's doings again. If they had had their way of it from the first he would not have had the opportunity of molesting honest people further after that shooting business. His share in that was sufficient to hang any man !" etc.

On the afternoon of the arrest, Fred and Mr. Champley duly presented themselves at The Gums, and were welcomed by Mr. and Miss Dunsmere. The former, in his jocular way, immediately began

twitting Fred for having at last come within the clutches of the law. He hoped Melville was not arrested on suspicion of committal of the crime with which poor Mostyn had been charged.

"You know, Champley, it's as well to have us all up, you would then be sure of having the real culprit."

Fred in the meantime had followed Miss Dunsmere into the garden.

"We doubt, Mr. Dunsmere, that even if we had the whole community safe in durance we should then have the real culprit. It is more than likely that he has long since quitted the neighbourhood of the crime, for which perhaps we are to blame. But then as you know we had only the slightest traces to work upon, there being no one upon whom we could fix the suspicion of a motive for the crime. However, 'there is many a true word spoken in jest,' Mr. Dunsmere. You will scarcely credit that Mr. Fred Melville is now under arrest, at the instance of Mr. Joseph Jeffrey, Millewa, for cattle stealing."

Had a charge of dynamite been exploded in the dining-room, overwhelming all its contents in one vast wreck, the old gentleman could not have appeared more surprised. He started to his feet looking in silent wonderment at the inspector for a space.

"You cannot say so! Melville arrested for cattle stealing! Champley, you had better take me in charge for manslaughter or something! The whole country seems to be going topsy-turvy. Fred a cattle duffer! Ha! ha!" and the rosy face grew redder from merriment as the reaction set in. The joke was immense.

Noticing Melville's absence he excused himself to the inspector, and went into the dining-room, where he heard voices; finding Fred endeavouring to console his fiancée, who was weeping bitterly, he said—

"Dry your tears, child. There is nothing to cry

about. The whole thing's absurd! There is nothing strange in being arrested now-a-days. Look at poor Mostyn! 'Pon my soul, it's an honour to be charged with crime in these times. Fred will be all right. Keep a few tears for your old father, he may be wanted for something desperate before long! You're right, Melville; there's nothing to weep over. Nelly, my girl, the whole thing will be very soon put straight."

"Oh, papa, dear! how horrible it is that Fred should be deemed capable of such a mean crime. That horrid old Mr. Jeffrey! how I would like to box his ears! Do not fear for me, Fred, dear," and she whispered it through her tears, "it is through honour or dishonour."

When Fred had an opportunity of conversing with Mr. Dunsmere, he told him that a warrant had been issued for the arrest of Blackmore as an accomplice. Blackmore had charge of the cattle purchased by him in Victoria, and had taken them over to Queensland. If there was anything wrong in the matter, as Jeffrey's warrant inferred, Blackmore probably knew something about it.

"That scoundrel again!" said Mr. Dunsmere. "Surely he will not get out of the clutches of the law this time. However, we must do all we can to help you in this matter. Whatever can be done in an honourable manner, will be done, you may rest assured. Do not grieve, my child. Fred is not going far away from us. You may see him with me as often as you like, for I am not going to leave him alone to go mad, in confinement; nor will others of our mutual friends, you may be sure."

Fred had only just completed a series of affectionate good-byes when Mrs. Melville arrived, and in her kind, hopeful manner, soothed the young girl's grief.

Mr. Dunsmere rode into town between the superintendent and his companion.

When Blackmore's name began to be mentioned in connection with the affair, and the news spread that he was wanted as an accomplice, all were satisfied that he alone was the guilty party. But as that person had not been seen since the late trial, it was feared that he would elude the vigilance of the police. However, fortunately, he was by them cleverly traced to Melbourne, where he had disposed of a mob of high-class horses in the yards, and arrested at the border on his return to the back country before finding out that he was wanted by the police.

Meantime Fred Melville was safely shut up in the Westerton gaol, having been committed for trial.

The state of doing nothing was inexpressibly irksome to him. It was almost unbearable. Being near home he was regularly visited by relatives and friends, and the townspeople were very kind in their solicitations on his behalf. All sorts of good things were provided for him. He had fresh flowers daily, and books of all kinds were sent for him to read; all Hawley Smart's sporting novels were forwarded uncut by one sporting friend, and he had his old companions, the works of Whyte Melville, all at hand; and his pocket companion, Gordon's poems, and that goes without saying, so popular are the ill-fated poet's writings with all young Australians. A neat pony phaeton drove up every afternoon, and out of it came Mrs. Melville and Miss Dunsmere. This was the hour of sunshine for Fred. Mrs. Dalglish and Miss Maitland frequently drove up to the precincts of the prison house and made an afternoon call, chatting gaily and cheerfully as was their wont, for poor Bob Dalglish seldom went out now. The winter proved very trying for him, his old energy had not yet returned. Other men frequently called in, each with something of interest to relate concerning affairs in the district, or to chat with him on the merits of the horses usually following the hunt, or of the qualities

of the hounds, and many a good yarn they had in such uncongenial surroundings.

Champley, too, occasionally came in for a chat when off duty. He told Fred of the arrest of Blackmore on the New South Wales border. Garry, too, would get permission to visit now and again in order to tell the owner of the good deeds of the big roan horse, Dangerous, and the welfare of the speedy chestnut, Charming.

Dangerous was now going steadily, no matter where he was put, though for a time after the steeplechase he was inclined to defy control at his fences. He had never had the steel on him since, and never would feel it again.

They had had a mock steeplechase across the paddock fences, with four other horses, and he had gone straight and kindly in every position in the field, winning easily at the last. The Warrnambool Steeplechase, Garry thought, was a certainty for him, and he hoped that Mr. Fred would be there to see his favourite perform.

Little Patsy O'Malley, who was now employed at Rosebrook, for since his sister's (poor Kate's) death, he cared no longer to live at home, also brought him intelligence of the welfare of the good brown, Gladiator, and Fred longed to have his hands on that horse's bridle, and to feel him swinging along in his striding gallop again in the wake of the musical merry hounds.

He was not kept a great while in suspense before the trial came on, and the matter was finally dealt with.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### QUEEN'S EVIDENCE

AS in the former case, when the Rev. James Mostyn was standing his trial, and for much the same reasons the present case caused the greatest excitement. The Melvilles were known by so many all through the colony, and others. Some, and their names were legion, had heard of their good repute as an old family of settlers, straightgoing sportsmen, athletes, and of manly bearing, immensely popular in their own district, and much respected out of it. The venue of the trial was set for The Hume, that being the locality from which the cattle had been stolen, but that did not prevent the best known people on the Glenelg river and many others from that place from attending the trial.

By common consent the hounds were kept in their kennels on two consecutive hunting days out of respect to the family who had been all along the foremost supporters of the pack, and all of the hard riding men who could get away hurried off that they might stand beside Fred Melville in the time of need. There was not one laggard in speech or action when anything was to be said or done in his favour. There had been no discord among the dwellers on the river over the affair, simply because there was no difference of opinion. All were unanimous in their belief that the



Melvilles were, to put it in the colonial way, "straight as a line."

Any case having reference to stock matters will always bring together an interested concourse of pastoralists, whose interests are common, and this may have influenced the unusual gathering of men from across the border, as well as the personal friends of the prosecutor and accused, on the day of the trial.

There was a murmur of indignation heard when it became known that Blackmore had turned Queen's evidence, and so escaped the toils that all regarded as justly his due, and one little fellow in court swore a wild Irish oath, that "the black divil would reckon wid him yit, so he would."

An epitome of the evidence may be given :—

Joseph Jeffrey stated that some time ago, as near as he could recollect two years last May, he had missed forty head of cattle from his Millewa paddock. The cattle had a cross of the polled Angus strain in them, and could readily be distinguished from other cattle by anyone knowing anything of that breed, from a peculiarity about the head, though all the traits of the pure blood did not show themselves. He at first thought that the cattle might have swam over the river and gone into the big marshy bends on the St. Martin's run on the other side, where cattle were somewhat difficult to find. His stockmen had visited that run during the following musters, but had only brought over three or four cows which had crossed over from the breeding paddock. About a month ago he was informed by a Victorian drover, who had come through from Queensland with stores, that he had seen a few head of cattle in a small paddock on the Chambers river bearing his (Jeffrey's) brand J.J.3. Being a judge of cattle, the drover further stated that he could always swear to the cattle referred to, having a dash of the Angus strain in them. Acting on this information he went up to the locality in Queensland,

known as Boolgooroon, and found in the hotel keeper's (Whitely's) paddock ten head of his cattle amongst a small mob of others, and at once identified his cattle by the brands and marks. Gave them into the custody of the police, and made enquiry from the person in whose possession he found them, as to how they came into his hands. He asserted that they had been purchased as fats out of a mob said to be travelling to North Queensland, Blackmore in charge, two years previously. Showed me a receipt duly signed by Blackmore, on behalf of F. Melville, for purchase of thirty head of cattle at £4 per head. Heard there that another lot of cattle had been sold out of the same mob at Hereford Springs further out. Went thither and identified five head of cattle as my property. Handed them over to the police. The owner of the place produced a receipt similar to the previous one for twenty head of fat cattle at £4 per head. Both parties admitted having killed the bulk of the cattle purchased by them, some having the brands (mine) specified on receipts, and selling the beef to contractors and travellers, and afterwards disposing of the hides to hawkers, etc. Found three of my hides in Greenaway's possession at Hereford Springs. They showed my brand. Each man, Whitely and Greenaway, stated that in consequence of the drover's averring that he could not accept cheques, owing to the owner's instructions, payment had to be made in current coin. They usually had a quantity of gold and notes in hand in order to facilitate the cashing of cheques, and so made the purchases in the required manner. Heard of other sales made by the same drover *en route*, but failed to trace any more of my cattle. Subsequently issued a warrant for the arrest of Frederick Melville, and one for the drover Blackmore. Cattle produced outside of the court are mine, and are those referred to as having been discovered in Queensland. Never sold any of that

particular breed to any one. Was keeping them till this year.

Amos Whitely, publican, of Boolgooroon, Queensland, swore to ten head of the cattle outside the court as having been purchased by him out of a travelling mob from Blackmore, who was in charge, and gave evidence as to the method of payment. The receipt produced is the one given by Blackmore.

John Greenaway, storekeeper and publican, at Hereford Springs, Queensland, gave similar evidence. Remembered the prosecutor, Jeffrey, calling at his place and claiming three head of cattle, now outside the court, as his property. Was certain that the cattle in question were purchased from Blackmore. Do at times buy cattle from drovers, lame ones, etc., but always get a receipt containing the brands in order to be on the safe side. Seldom purchased so many. Would not have done so on that occasion only the cattle were good and cheap, as fat cattle were scarce in the district, owing to a drought that year. Those now in the custody of the police were not killed because they fell off in condition before being required, and had only lately begun to improve.

Blackmore's evidence was eagerly listened to by all. He remembered taking delivery, in May, '90, of nine hundred head of mixed cattle on the river Murray. Was instructed to sell any that he could dispose of at £4 or £5 per head cash. The J.J.3 cattle were especially pointed out to him as being prime beef. Was to get 10/- per head for all delivered at Lake Melville station, North Queensland, and had to pay 30/- per head for all not accounted for. It was not usual to take stock out of Victoria for Queensland, but this was done as a trial, the Victorian cattle being remarkably quiet and steady, whereas the North Queensland cattle were very wild, and would not settle down to fatten. Sold fifty head of cattle *en route*. The receipt now shown was from the prisoner, Frederick Melville,

for the sum of two hundred pounds sterling (£200) for fat cattle sold *en route*. Delivered eight hundred and forty head. Was not charged for the remaining ten head, as prisoner said that the delivery was good, considering the state of the country for feed and water, and the distance traversed. Have always enjoyed a good reputation as a drover. Produced testimonials from several well-known pastoralists in support of this statement.

The prisoner, in accordance with the new regulations, was permitted to make a statement. In May, '90, took delivery of nine hundred head of Victoria bred quiet cattle near Echuca, Victoria. Bought them at various places. Wanted a drover. Blackmore was recommended by the agents. Handed the cattle over to him in the terms mentioned. Instructed him to sell about twenty head of fats if he could get £5 per head for them. He delivered eight hundred and forty head, and gave me the sum of £100 in cash, representing the value of twenty head, said to have been sold along the road. Did not charge him for the balance, as I considered the delivery good, considering the state of the roads, and the drover's statement as the cause of the shortage owing to hardship. Knew nothing of cattle branded J.J 3. Never purchased them in Victoria or delivered them to witness Blackmore. This is my handwriting in the receipt shown, and my signature for two hundred pounds. Am certain I only received one hundred pounds sterling. First word must have been altered from one to two. The one is not as I usually write it.

The speech made by the counsel for the defence was cleverly worded, but the clever lawyer, Fordham, had nothing to work on, only the prisoner's excellent character and reputation. Nor could he bring anything against the man who had turned Queen's evidence. *His* testimonials were first-class as a drover, and nothing was known derogatory to his good name.

The judge was a stranger to the prisoner, and known only to Western District men by hearsay, and in his own mind a previous good character did not weigh for much against evidence. His experience taught him that there were very many wolves going about in sheep's clothing. He usually sat in a district where cattle duffing was no uncommon crime, and had been very severe on the offenders brought before him in more than one instance. In this case he spoke thusly : "Cattle stealing was a crime that must be put down with a strong hand. It was too common in the colonies. It had grown customary for drovers to pick up cattle *en route* and claim them, and in some cases, as in this, cattle had been boldly 'lifted' and driven away in a large mob bound for a distant destination, where they were usually disposed of in a manner satisfactory to the depredator. In this instance, by a chance circumstance, a peculiar breed of cattle was identified many hundred miles away from their run, and were found to be identical with cattle stolen from Victoria. In fact were identified by the prosecutor as his property, having been missing from his run since about the time the prisoner's mob were taken to Queensland from this neighbourhood. Through the evidence of the drover they are accurately traced to the places where they were sold. They had the prisoner's own admission that he received a sum of money representing the value of cattle sold out of the mob, and his receipt was before them duly signed. There is this difference. The drover states that he sold fifty head at £4 per head, receiving, when paying over to his employer the sum of £200, the receipt in court, which seems regularly drawn up, albeit regarded by the prisoner, who does not deny his signature, as partly forged. We have not to deal with supposition. It is clear that these cattle were taken from Victoria with the prisoner's cattle. Prisoner admits that the number was short at time of delivery, but asks us to

believe that he did not charge the drover 30/- per head according to agreement for the forty head short after the twenty sold were accounted for, as the travelling was that season difficult. The receipt for £200 shows clearly that more than twenty head of cattle were disposed of. Probably fifty head were thus sold." Later he said "that he fully concurred in the verdict of the jury, as it was fully evident to his mind that a flagrant case of cattle stealing had been proved. He had, therefore, no hesitation in sentencing the prisoner to six years' hard labour in the Cotherstone gaol. It grieved him to see a man of prisoner's standing in the dock, but his 'was the greater condemnation.'"

There was complete silence for a moment or two, and each one of the Western District men looked to the other as if doubting the evidence of his senses; then came a sudden buzz of voices in an undertone, a sudden rushing of feet, following a cry of agony. Then a lady heavily veiled was carried silently from the court. This was Miss Dunsmere who had fainted, and would have fallen, but for her father's arm. Mrs. Melville followed the senseless form to the ladies' room, and George Melville, white to the lips, moved, with his hand to his face, out of the court, followed by the men who had come over with him to the trial. They said little. They were as men who shut their teeth and hold their breath before striking a mighty blow. He would be brave who applauded that verdict in their hearing. Still there were in the court men, unprejudiced, knowing personally neither of the parties to the suit, who felt in their own minds from the evidence the judge had no other alternative. Innocent the prisoner might be, but still, all things considered, the case looked very black against him.

As Blackmore left the precincts of the court a young man stepped up to him, saying, "Yez know me, o'im Patsy O'Malley Take that, and that, ye

blackguard!" striking Blackmore fair in the face twice.

It might have gone hard with Patsy, as Blackmore had a reputation as an ugly customer in a fight, were it not that a stalwart Hibernian policeman interfered with "Be japers, if yez get foighting hare yez 'ull have toime to ripint in the logs beyant. Be off wid yiz."

Fred Melville was removed from the court between two policemen, and conducted to a cell, whence he would be removed in a day or two to the place of confinement.

Only his intimate friends were allowed to see him, and then but for a few minutes. But during that brief space George, his brother, had time to whisper "Cheer up, Fred, old man! Don't fret your soul to death in here. You are morally entitled to freedom as an innocent man, and as such you shall yet be free. Do not give way to useless anger in your solitude, and so do yourself irreparable injury, nor grieve over what has happened. You have one little consolation, the exercise ground at Cotherstone lies below the gaol walls. You will be able to see the horses doing their walks in the afternoons. Do not neglect every opportunity of doing so, it will lighten your exile. Cheer up, old fellow," and with a long hand grip, for it *was* "the clasp of an only brother," George parted. There were no spoken words between Fred and his fiancée when Miss Dunsmere came to see him, only a close, passionate compression of strong arms, and the sobbing of a heart that was ready to break, a long, lingering, loving kiss, and then the door of the cell was bolted on the prisoner within.

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE ESCAPE

IT may be that all prison houses are alike destitute of comfort. That is well, and as it should be, else would there be no punishment in incarceration within their bare walls, though no doubt the prisoners are as well treated as the regulations admit.

Fred Melville, pent up in a cell in Her Majesty's gaol at Cotharstone, shut out from all companionship, and as yet only allowed a little daily exercise in the prison yard, carefully guarded even then, felt that such treatment would drive him mad, and longed for the time when he would be sent out "to labour." It did not matter to him how hard the work might be, quarrying stones, loading gravel, anything, the heavier the task set him the better, so that his muscles might grow weary, and neperthe come to his throbbing brain in the calm of toil-won sleep. With the incessant cadence of a waterfall there was ever running through his mind every word of Blackmore's evidence, which was indelibly imprinted there, and at the repetition of that part of it relating to his having given that scoundrel special instructions to dispose of the J.J.3 cattle, the blood surged through his veins, and his neck swelled as if it would burst with fierce anger. He longed to catch hold of something and wrestle with it, and the knuckles on his right hand were cut and bleeding where he had struck out at the bare stone



wall in the height of his wrath. It would be an ill day for Blackmore if ever they two met in the open field, and they would meet, though he waited for years and tracked his enemy over the world, unless, and he prayed to God that it might not be so, death robbed him of that grim pleasure. It would be a fair fight, but he would give years of his life for the pleasure of putting forth all his strength in the fistic strife. Here he was, innocent of any crime, cut off from the society of those he loved, deprived of the freedom he had so thoroughly enjoyed all the days of his life so far, with the warm generous blood, the active, energetic brain, and the strong muscles of full manhood, immured within dark walls, where the full rays of the sun could not penetrate, while his maligner, whose lying evidence had brought this disaster, was allowed to go free out into the glorious sunshine, a good horse beneath him, bounding over the springy turf, and a lightness in his heart from the inhalation of the glorious, rushing, fresh air, such as every man feels under similar circumstances, while enjoying the prospect of things that are pleasing to the eye. How bitterly Fred thought of his altered prospects, and with what sorrow he dwelt upon the parting from that dear sweet girl, who loved him still, though how hard it must be, it seemed to him, for her to be deemed the affianced wife of a felon. Her father, he knew, was firmly on his side, and bitter in his wrath against the villain who had brought his imprisonment about ; and Fred knew that his brother George would do all that he could to make his burden lighter to bear. Of the old white-haired mother, the source of all that was in him of good, he thought sadly. But then, had she not said as she clasped his hand in a close farewell, " Fred, my son, have courage. You are innocent. It is only for the guilty that imprisonment is intended as a degradation. You cannot be permitted to suffer long. Remember that we

are with you always in our thoughts, and how willingly we would share your burden if that were possible. Do not give way to anger, so that when the doors are unclosed you may come forth to us the cheerful lad that you were wont to be. It is not in the power of man to bring disgrace upon you while your conscience is void of offence. What is man's weak judgment, whose life is but a span, compared with His, who is to all eternity, and has power over both the body and the soul. Rest assured that your captivity is not for long, my son ; the guilty person will soon be discovered, and yourself respected more than ever, if that can be. I will see you as often as possible, and in the meantime will try to comfort the dear girl, who will yet be my honoured and beloved daughter."

Fred remembered this, yet he could not help brooding over his present position. If they would only let him out in the open air it would be different. He would feel the warmth of the sun on his body, the clear bracing air inflating his lungs again, and his eyes would see the sloping downs wending away to the feet of the far cloud-capped mountains that they had so often rested upon, when the flush of the noontide sun lit up the cliff faces, or the glow of sunset flushed with its vermilion hues the leafy terraces that clothed, as with a glory of tresses, the everlasting hills. His ears would listen once more to the rustling of the leaves with their innumerable voices, to the hum of the bees mid the flowers, and to the shrill shriek of the locust in the seeding grass of early spring.

One little comfort was his ; it was even as George had said, for standing on the seat that was left him, he could through a corner of the iron-barred window, catch a glimpse of the clothed strings of racehorses doing quiet exercise along the level, or slowly ascending the steep hill, which was reckoned of so much advantage to a horse's training, bringing wind and muscle into play as it did, by one or two of the astute

western trainers, for their cross-country charges. Whilst enjoying this little respite from the gloomy aspect of prison walls, the fourth day of his imprisonment, and idly watching the slouching gait of two powerful horses that had not been on the track the day before, under the guidance of a black boy, the peculiar long, springy stride and bold carriage of the sheeted head of one, seemed strangely familiar to him. Yes! there could be no mistaking it! his heart seemed to leap in his body as he fully recognised the pair. What could they be doing there? And a thought flashed across him, "You are wrongly imprisoned, an innocent man, and as the innocent man you shall be free. The Cotherstone training ground lies at the foot of the gaol walls; do not neglect an opportunity of watching the horses." These were his brother's words, and he understood their meaning now.

Another person noticed the strange horses, as he sat on the green slope, and witnessed his own stable lads going the self-same round, time after time, kicking along their lazy going charges as they strode steadily at exercise, sheeted and bandaged, and, as the two strangers passed him, the one being led and the other ridden, he said to the lad in the saddle,—

"What horses have you there, my boy?"

"Darkie and Adonis, sir."

"Very good!" said the trainer to himself. "Very good! Darkie and Adonis! a roan and a black," and later, as the lad repassed, he said—

"Got the saddle in the wrong place on your horses, my boy; ought to have it outside the rug," and to himself he said, "Gad, they might be going for a trial! I'm in luck's way. It's all right, my boy, keep the pigskin there! Chafes their shoulders on the top of the rug. You're right."

Twenty minutes later Fred was allowed out into the yard to stretch his limbs. His custodian, feeling everything safe, left his seat on an upturned box

covered with a bag, and went into his room, locking the door securely behind him. In a second Fred had placed the box near the wall, and catching the bag, double as it was, in both hands, took a few steps backward, and with a quick rush placed his foot lightly on the top of the box, and with a mighty spring threw his protected hands up to the top of the high masonry, surmounted by broken glass bottles, strongly cemented in, and drawing himself up by the strength of strong athletic muscles, touched the top with his foot and dropped lightly to the sward outside. The moment he scaled the wall he was perceived by the boy in charge of the two strange horses, who flung himself from his mount, and, rapidly throwing off the loose rugs, disclosed the forms of two horses in the pink of condition, fitted as to saddles, breastplates and surcingle as if about to start for a race. Another also perceived the occurrence. That was Andy Murchison, the trainer aforesaid, who, starting up from his recumbent position, said, "Darkie and Adonis, my boy! Thunderbolt and Dangerous, for a kingdom! And they're going for the trial."

"Clear off home, boys, quick!" speaking to his lads who were passing with their horses, and to himself he said, "Someone might take a fancy to include old Modesty there in the trial, and it's not unlikely that with ten stone up she'd split the pair."

For once in his life Fred Melville despised himself as a thought struck him. It seemed as if he was running away from the justice he had, from his youth up, learned to respect. It was only for a second, though; for the remembrance came to him that justice had been blind, a villain had tampered with those scales which only the gentle touch of the Angel of Mercy should ever be permitted to bias, and as he thought thus his head was flung back, and the old free, fearless look appeared on his face as he stepped quietly up to the horses.

"Ye're safe, glory be to God, Mr. Fred, when ye're hand's on the roan! Shtrike for the mail stables, and o'im with ye on The Bowlt," and Fred knew by the accent, that behind the burnt cork was the honest face of the little horseman, Patsy O'Malley.

As he ran his hand quickly and steadily over the face of his own good horse, and dropped hand and rein on his mane, he said, while putting his foot in the stirrup,—

"For home, Patsy, my boy," and quietly seated himself in the steeplechase saddle, starting off together at a steady gallop.

"Look out, Melville! the Sergeant's coming up fast!" shouted the trainer (saying to himself, "I'll pick up the rugs for them, the trial might not finish here!")

Looking over his shoulder Fred saw the gaily accoutred horse of that mounted trooper, who had been sauntering in to barracks from town duty, and had witnessed the flight from a distance, coming after them at a furious gallop.

Waving his hand to the trainer in acknowledgment of his timely warning, Fred increased his horse's pace, saying as he did so—"Patsy, we'll have to race! Let us see what sort of cattle the Force ride in this district;" and stride for stride the pair went at speed, while a shouting voice, accompanied by the clashing of a long sabre which swung backwards and forwards, smiting the stirrup with every stride of the galloping horse with a loud jangling sound, called upon them unavailingly to "Stop!"

Down the gully, and over the creek they went, and up the slope towards the strong three-rail fence of the Pound paddock.

"It's a stiff one, Patsy!" said Fred; and the next instant they were over it together.

Turning in his saddle Fred watched the Sergeant's attempt, and was astonished to see the jingling

equipments of the big bay floating in the sunlight over the top rail, though the horse clouted hard, being a bit blown from his unwieldy show condition.

There was no slacking of rein as the two steeplechasers lit out on the road from the paddock half-a-mile further on, where the big horse came to grief in a cloud of dust, flinging his rider clear.

"He's a game one," thought Fred, glad to see that the rider rose to his feet unhurt; though not sorry to observe that the horse had got up first, and was then careering wildly, with head up, and stirrups flying, towards his stables.

Pursuit was over for the present, so both horses were steadied down to a trot, and then to a walk, with reins hanging loosely, to recover their composure; for they were becoming excited and fretful from the sudden swift gallop they had done. Soon they were galloping steadily off again across the paddocks, going quietly as if for long exercise.

What a pleasure it was to Fred to feel the strong horse bounding under him again! hard held, with the knowledge that the animal could almost fly if allowed his head. The warm full free sunshine flashing on his firm-set face, and the chill air circling about him, making the rider feel as buoyant as if borne on the exultant, uprearing, resistless billows of the mighty sea.

Fence after fence stood up behind them; and road, field, and farmhouse fell back from the long, tireless strides of the thoroughbreds, as their heads were directed diagonally across the paddocks for the dark forest land lying on the horizon, over which the long luminous bars of cloud, touched with the crimson effulgence of sunset, indicated "the gates of the west."

More than one farmer that afternoon had reined up his horses, and from between the stilt of the plough, putting his hand over his eyes, had watched

the flight of the two good horses, till, like two friendly birds flying low for the forest shades at eventide, they were lost to sight in the distance.

At length the settled country was left behind them, and as night came on, under the light of the moon they were striding over the large sheep paddocks of station properties, and the fences were far between. Soon they struck a well-beaten track in the timber, and, after another mile was passed, reined up at the old mail stables under the Kewa Wirri hill, fifty miles of the homeward journey over. As the hoof-strokes approached, three horses were led out from the stalls; and George Melville, in riding costume, and old Jim the coach driver, stood at their heads.

Fred leaped to the ground, caught his brother's hand and held it in silence, looking into his face.

George spoke: "I could not endure to think, old man, that you should be shut up like a felon in darkness, deprived of freedom, when for your rectitude I could answer with my life, brought up as we were from childhood to loathe dishonesty, while regarding integrity and honour as the highest attributes of manhood. I felt sure you would recognise the horses, and understand the purpose of their presence there, though I feared that you might feel some compunctions about quitting the gaol in any other way than through the opened doors. For myself I had none such. You were innocent, and consequently should be free. There would have been no end of apologies later on, when the real culprit was brought to bay—as he will be; but that would not have saved you the dreary days of durance, and the sleepless nights of anguish that might have embittered your after life when freedom did come."

"Thank you, George! Your parting words flashed across me when I saw our horses at exercise, and I understood their meaning. Still, even when I had got outside the walls, I thought once of returning

and giving myself up. It was only the thought of the lying scoundrel who had brought it all about that carried me through; remembering, as I did, that he was at liberty who was doubly entitled to imprisonment, firstly as a thief, then as a perjurer; while I who had not offended one *iota* of the law, was condemned to years of servitude, shut out from all that was dear to me. My blood boils at the thought! George! you were right. In six months I would have been a madman. It was already at times as if the fiends of hell were whispering his lying evidence in my ears so that I could not shut it out. Look here!" and he showed the scarred knuckles. "But it is all right now, old fellow. I felt a man again coming side by side over the fences with little Patsy and Thunderbolt. It was a glorious ride—never a mistake the whole way. Post and rail, doubles and log fences, innumerable almost for the first few miles, and some awkward places since, but they never flinched. Ned! He's a beauty, the roan; the horse of a man's lifetime!"

"Ay! Mr. Fred," said the old driver; "a star in the firmament!" And he stroked the round muscular neck that was bowed over a bucket of hot gruel.

"Are you tired, Patsy?" said George Melville.

"No, sir, as keen yit as if we'd only had a check wid the hounds. Oi did nothing but sit, and hould on, and the black went as if he was the shaddy of the roan."

"We'll lead your horses alongside and take the road for it now. Are they fit to do it, Fred?"

"With the weight off their backs they'll do the other fifty easily," said Fred. "We cannot leave them behind."

Saddles were changed to the backs of the fresh horses. "The Trader's your mount, Patsy," so saying Fred felt the broad ribs of the muscular Gladiator



between his knees, and on his right the round game head of the gallant Dangerous looked through the halter as if ready for another start, while George on the great quiet, ragged-hipped bay Mameluke, led off his wiry, tireless black, after all had taken a silent hand grip of the staunch old mail-driver.

Once more they were galloping steadily along over the fretwork of light that the moonshine was laying on the beaten roadway as it shot glances through the boughs of the overhanging trees. Fred could see before him the out-lined ragged hips of the leader, and the dark streaks on his quarters where the muscles were tirelessly playing, as stride after stride like clockwork the horse's muscular limbs were gathered under him and flung back again with rhythmical precision of hoofbeats. Thus they strode over the level, and over the sand-dunes, where the honeysuckles grew, anon startling from their resting-places in the dense foliated trees by the roadside numbers of drowsy birds—magpies, minahs, and parrots—which, bewildered by the noise and the darkness, beat the foliage with their wings, uttering affrighted cries, in their anxiety to make an escape. Opossums scuttled merrily up the rough sides of the stringy barks on the ridges, and kangaroos beat a warning tattoo with their feet as they took to flight; but the onward career of the horses never slackened for any of these things. At midnight the inhabitants of the township of Wirringo heard the trample of galloping hoof-strokes, and turned in their beds, muttering: "It's these wild fellows from Stuart's Mill been drinking up at 'The Flag,' again," and once more composed themselves to sleep.

Ere daybreak, Fred was seated before a comfortable fire at the Rosebrook breakfast table, and when three hours later, Inspector Champley and two of his merry men rode up, all appeared tranquil as usual. Thunderbolt and Freetrader, warmly rugged and clean as if

they had never been out of the boxes, were enjoying their ease with dignity, for they had received all the attention that men's hands could bestow on two favourites deserving of the highest honours.

It had gone abroad that Dangerous was on his way to Warrnambool with Charming, so that *his* absence was accounted for if noticed at all, from the training establishment; but as the pen was put through his name shortly afterwards for the big event there, he was associated with his owner in the popular escape and cross-country ride which was daily talked of and the exploit magnified. Only the trainer could have enlightened people as to who the black horse and rider were who shared the gallop; but he was silent on the point for many a day. Though when asked his opinion on the question of the scratching of the horse for the Grand National, said briefly, "Broken down in the trial probably," and that was an end of it so far as he was concerned.

George Melville and Inspector Champley again had breakfast together at Rosebrook, pending (in Champley's mind) the arrival of the delinquent, and George, so Champley said afterward, "never seemed in better spirits" than that morning, cracking jokes and spinning yarns one after the other; for he did not know, thought the Inspector, that all the approaches to the station from the eastern side were carefully guarded by good men who knew how to do their duty, and that duty lay in the arrest of the host's brother.

No horseflesh could have accomplished the distance in the time in order to have reached there before the arrival of the police, and there was certainly no quicker means of travel.

At dusk that day, the Inspector was satisfied that the escaped prisoner had gone in another direction than that of the old home, and turned his attention towards the southern bay, with no better result.

Fred Melville was missed from the district, and though the circumstance was much regretted, still his friends, and they were many, were glad in their hearts that he had got clear away ; for they felt that he was innocent of the crime laid to his charge, and by all moral law should be enjoying the liberty that he so much loved, and to which as a liege subject, he had forfeited no right.

No insult had been intended to Her Gracious Majesty, nor did either of the Melvilles feel at heart that he was breaking her laws, when racing through the moonlit forests the previous night together. It was only as if they were thwarting the dark scheme of a scoundrel, who was himself, even then, in all probability arranging some vile plot for some other innocent person's destruction.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE NEW MANAGER

SHORTLY after the trial, when its result had been made manifest in Fred's detention, George Melville had written to Jimmy Don advising him of his brother's detention for six years on Blackmore's evidence, and telling him that he would endeavour to engage a manager in his partner's place, whilst he, Don, would still continue, he hoped, to discharge the duties of overseer at an increased salary. He would advise later, when the manager would leave Sydney, and in the meantime Don could prepare the homestead for the new man's arrival.

Don and the men under him on the station were almost beside themselves with anger when they heard of the master's imprisonment, and more than one man vowed "he'd kick that Blackmore to within an inch of his life if ever he came across him."

The Heywood Downs people were also strongly indignant. The young clergyman, after the first outbreak of righteous indignation, scarcely spoke a word for days, so deeply did he feel the insult to his friend, and the treachery of the villain who had also endeavoured to place himself in the light of an assassin.

A short time after the receipt of Mr. Melville's more recent advice, that the new manager, Mr. Vincent, might be expected, that gentleman arrived at Lake Melville, and introduced himself to the overseer.

Mr. Vincent was a well preserved middle-aged gentleman with a genial face surrounded by a snow white neatly trimmed beard. He wore gold-rimmed blue spectacles, as his eyes had been injured in the sun glare of the Gulf Country, so trying to the sight. Many men also, as in his case, had grown grey there before their time, or had become prematurely bald.

"You have splendid country here, Mr. Don, wonderful cattle country I should say !

"Mr. Melville explains to me the reason of my appointment, as you will see by his note here. I deeply regret the circumstance there alluded to, and am very much afraid that I shall fall far short of your late master in everything. I will, however, do my duty as nearly as my judgment will allow me, and I trust we shall be friends, for you have an excellent repute with every one with whom I have come in contact *en route*.

"In the first place I wish to make my acquaintance with the run, inspecting the cattle at the same time, and making myself familiar with their favourite feeding grounds, camps, etc. Kindly apportion to me an intelligent black boy, therefore, on whose knowledge of the bush I can rely. In the morning, as a beginning, we will look at the horseflesh. You see here that Mr. Melville states that Mr. Fred's horses are at my service. I like to be well carried, above all things."

All this was spoken with a regular guardsman's drawl which it is impossible to reproduce.

Don looked the new manager over critically, clad as he was in the wide, baggy breeches and gaiters so much affected by new chums, saying to him as he did so, that "His wishes would always be attended to. The cattle were very good, and the run was in splendor for grass and water. They had some excellent horseflesh—could not go wrong in fact for a good one. Mr. Fred's horses could scarcely be beaten any-

where. If he might say so, he would advise Mr. Vincent to ride some of his (Don's) hacks which were in regular work. They were good. Mr. Fred's horses had not been saddled since he left, and being animals of great breeding and spirit had been difficult to subdue, and were still always hostile to strangers. However, as Mr. Vincent wished, those of them at hand would be brought in, and could be inspected in the morning."

Mr. Vincent spent the remainder of the afternoon in going over the station books, and from the questions he asked about the stock, when looking over the entries pertaining to that department, Don rapidly inferred that the new manager was no novice amongst cattle.

Next morning, after breakfast, a move was made towards the stockyard by Mr. Vincent and Don (the latter issuing from his own establishment, a cottage near the homestead), each with a bridle across his arm. Arrived there, the new comer expressed surprise at the quality of the horses within the enclosure, and turning to his companion said—

"Don, you will please continue to give the men the necessary instructions till such time as I shall have become sufficiently acquainted with the station work to know what is best to be done."

"Very good, sir; I told them to await your instructions this morning. We intended cutting out cattle on Heywood Downs boundary. They are mustering their fats for the southern markets."

"I will accompany you then" said Mr. Vincent. "It will be an introduction for me to some of the neighbours."

"Those are five of Mr. Fred Melville's horses, sir, in the next yard. There are others out on the run, which he used occasionally."

"Aw! Indeed! Magnificent animals they are! I shall ride that dappled grey to-day."

There was a smile on the faces of the stockmen as they heard the announcement, spoken in drawling tones, and looked at the unbushmanlike garments of the speaker, while awaiting the overseer's reply."

"That's Maelstrom, by Manifest. Buck a town down with a stranger! Better not ride him, sir."

"Aw! Indeed! Fine looking animal! Beautiful beast, that chestnut too, will ride her."

"She is as good as she looks, but she was an outlaw before Mr. Fred got her. Her name is Sweetlips, but she'd chew a man up if he fell off. She tried to savage Mr. Fred at first."

"Aw! I don't like that class of animal, certainly. They can't be all bad, surely! I'll wide the gwey at all wisks. Have had one aw two lessons in Waywey's system yaws ago."

"Catch the grey for Mr. Vincent, Lowe" (speaking to the colt breaker).

"No, thank you, Don, prefer catching him myself if he is put into the small yard."

The grey was accordingly put into the small yard, snorting and tossing up his head as he challenged the intruder bent upon his capture,

"Mind his heels! sir," said Don as the grey swung rapidly round and lashed out viciously with both hoofs.

"Steady, my lad!" and the words were firmly spoken, whilst the grey stood with his quarters cringed against the rails, the white of his eyes showing as he looked askance at the outstretched palm. Stretching his head out like that of a snake, and twitching his ears, he protruded his muzzle towards his would-be captor's hand to withdraw it, ere touching, with a snort, and to thrust it forward again immediately, this time touching the hand and smelling it again and again, snorting uneasily the while. Quickly the hand slipped over the wide-opened nostril, over the broad forehead, down the muscular neck, and as rapidly, a

strong bridle was slipped over the twitching ears, to the surprise of the stockmen.

Rarey's lessons had not been thrown away on the new manager, evidently. A saddle was quietly put on the broad back of the horse, and as the girth was drawn round him, loosely at first, he suddenly gathered himself together, and, with lowered head, threatened to resent the indignity by an exhibition of buckjumping. Having been led round the inside of the yard for a time or two, the stockmen watched breathlessly the next performance. Catching the reins short in his left hand and grasping the mane firmly, the old gentleman put his foot into the stirrup, and slowly putting his weight on the leather, grasped the pommel and was seated quietly in the saddle before the grey knew he had left the ground.

"Now for it!" thought the onlookers.

Leaning over the horse's neck the rider caressed him with his hand, and spoke some words in a low tone that was not heard by those outside the yard, and the horse, at the touch of the bit on his mouth, swung sharply round on his heels twice as if about to give the exhibition all expected, then threw down his head, blew through his nostrils, flung out his tail and ambled out of the yard.

The new manager had scored a very strong point in the eyes of the stockmen. Though they had smiled at "the bags," yet they now admitted freely there was nothing of the "new chum" about *him*.

"Must have been on a station in the old country," said one, and there was a general laugh at the bushman's knowledge or wit.

By mid-day there was a large mob of cattle on the "Kangaroo Camp," and also a goodly muster of horsemen there assembled. The Downs people had put together all their outside cattle, and this camp was the last to work on. The three Mostyns were present, and were duly introduced by Don to the new



manager of Lake Melville. Each man recognised in the new-comer a gentleman, though it seemed to them that Mr. Vincent was hardly the sort of man to superintend the working of a large cattle station; there was such a new chum cut about him. They wondered, however, at seeing him complacently mounted on the grey Maelstrom, which had a considerable reputation, even up there, as a buckjumper, and would like to have questioned Don as to how he got there; but there was little time for talking—a lot of work had still to be done.

Before the day was over all the required cattle had been cut out, and Mr. Vincent had won golden opinions from all for his skill in the saddle.

“I’ve heard of the riding of some of these English hunting men in The Shires, with their lispy drawl and fine manners, and I wouldn’t be a bit surprised if there is not a good deal of the Honourable Crasher about this old gentleman when he’s out with the fox hounds. I question very much if we’ve got many who can teach him anything on a cattle camp either,” said George Mostyn to his brother Jim.

In such manner did Mr. Vincent make his bow to the dwellers on Lake Melville and Heywood Downs stations, and they soon had further cause to comment favourably on their new neighbour’s skill and courtesy.

Accompanied only by a black boy the new comer made long daily pilgrimages over the run, frequently camping out and visiting all the cattle camps, besides making himself familiar with the locations of favourite feeding grounds of the cattle. In a very short time he knew where such and such cattle were to be found, and to which camp each mob would run when started.

Jimmy Don could never quite make Vincent out. He was so cool and collected in his demeanour, never entering into conversation with any one, other than to make some necessary observation. Still he was ex-

tremely deferential to his overseer's knowledge of the country, and although apparently distant in his manner, was always gentlemanly towards Don.

With the police he was soon much respected, always lending them assistance in the discharge of their duty when it was required. Inspector Ayre, himself a comparatively late importation from home, a man of energy and refinement, was a frequent visitor at the station, for the bushrangers had been causing some anxiety of late in the district, and was not a little surprised at the manager's proficiency with the revolver. Each man carried a pistol out there, for the blacks were very treacherous still, although not so bold as they had been.

Mr. Vincent would scarcely ever miss a bird at gunshot distance with his Webley, and could pot wild dogs at any time when riding at full gallop.

"Bad look out for the bushrangers if they stick up your place, Vincent! 'Gad, I wish I could handle my six-shooter like you. I'd face the lot of them single handed."

"Don't think they'll come here, Ayre; nothing to steal except horseflesh, and they'll find that article out on the run without much difficulty. Would prefer them sending in their cards though when they do come. Don't like this 'Throw up your hands' business in the dark with a half a dozen revolvers held in your face. Couldn't shoot much then, I fancy."

The police, though they made every effort, were unable to trace Jimmy Don's favourite brown, Sluggard; and now several good horses were reported as missing from the neighbouring stations.

Cottesmore had, since the first effort to take him off the run, been left severely alone, nor had any one come forward to claim the excellent stock saddle now doing good service for Long Jack, who had sworn that if the horse stealers left a track on Heywood Downs again, that his little black boy Jingler could ferret

out, and it must be a very faint trail that that urchin couldn't follow, he would like to try how Cottesmore could compare with the marauder's horseflesh in a spin across country, and Jimmy Don longed to bear him company, for they had never paid him for Sluggard, and now the account, interest added, had run into formidable figures; he was therefore desirous of presenting it without further delay.

## CHAPTER XXI

### IN GOOD COMPANY

THE good ship Cuzco, from London, for ports of Melbourne and Sydney, numbered among its many passengers two persons concerning whom in these pages a considerable amount has been written. They were Miss Vernon and her brother Jack.

It was saddening to look upon Miss Vernon when she entered the ship, remembering her as a merry warm-hearted young girl two years ago.

They were a merry party on board. Concerts, dances, musical evenings, were all indulged in to pass the time, and in this merry companionship Miss Vernon began to improve.

It was with a throb at the heart and a catching of the breath that she heard first of her brother Jack's intention to take her out to Australia, in accordance with the doctor's advice, while hope began to spring in her heart again at the thought that she might meet once more that beloved exile, whose face looked sadly upon her in dreams by night and in the glamour of long reveries by day. It was noticeable that she began to revive, and in the society of two cheerful Australian girls, her bosom friends, and kin to her though by a distant line of ancestry, whom she had first met in London, now returning to the antipodes, the voyage was working wonders on her state of health. The ladies alluded to were the Misses

Mostyn, who since the sale of their Victorian property had been in England with relatives, amongst whom were the Vernons. And now, with their aunt, late wife of a Queensland sugar planter who had made a large fortune and then succumbed to the effects of early privations in the far north, intended passing a short time in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, and afterwards going out to North-western Queensland to their brothers' station, Heywood Downs, for the winter months.

Miss Vernon and her brother Jack received a most cordial invitation to meet them in Brisbane and go out together to the bush, after the Vernons had taken a thorough look round Victoria, which it was their present intention to do, at first. The Misses Mostyn had the most pleasant recollections of their old home in the West, and were never tired of expatiating on the beauties of the Glen Avon country, where they had resided.

Jack Vernon was only too glad to fall in with the proposed arrangements; for the doctor, a retired Australian, whom he had consulted, stated that if the Victorian climate effected a change for the better in Miss Vernon's health, her brother could then take her into the interior of Queensland, where her recovery would be complete. Otherwise, the Queensland climate was too enervating, and would tend to totally prostrate an invalid such as she then was. Vernon was very pleased that his sister had such suitable companions on the voyage, for her medical adviser had said to him that hers did not seem to be so much a physical malady, and therefore cheerful company was an urgent necessity for her.

In due course the city of Melbourne was reached, but Vernon, finding after a short residence there that the climate did not agree so well with his sister, travelled by rail to the inland towns with her, and ultimately found himself at Westerton, where, without

loss of time, Jack presented himself and his credentials at The Gums.

Mr. Dunsmere was delighted to meet him, as a friend of his only brother, and gave at once a most cordial and pressing invitation to Vernon and Miss Vernon to stay at The Gums while in the district.

"Been in the colony three weeks, and did not come to see me sooner! I'm annoyed, Vernon, exceedingly. Simpson! tell the groom to have the carriage brought round at once."

There was little time lost, for in twenty minutes the old gentleman was driving Vernon fast back to the hotel where Miss Vernon was staying, and arriving there, greeted her as affectionately as if she had been a near relative.

It was indeed a pleasant meeting between the two girls. Miss Dunsmere had heard of Miss Vernon long ago, though they had never met till now, and Miss Vernon had heard of Nelly from her dear, dear Reg. The girls immediately embraced after this confidence, and had a good cry in each other's arms. To say that they were good friends from thenceforth and for ever more is unnecessary.

Jack Vernon could scarcely believe his eyes. This the girl who sat for weeks moping and refusing to be comforted! Why, in a few days, at The Gums, she was all laughter and sunshine, and fairly ran skipping through the garden arm in arm with Nelly Dunsmere.

Mr. Dunsmere had said to him, "Vernon, I have heard of you from my brother long since as a most promising young officer, and I am very glad indeed to meet you here."

"Sir, if you will pardon me for re-opening a subject which must still be painful to you, I will say that my sister's illness, and the consequent necessity for a change of climate, gives me an opportunity of prosecuting a search for one who once saved my life, who was ever my sincerest friend, a man honourable in all

his dealings, and a general favourite. I allude to your son. You, sir, may not be aware that a lady of whom you have heard by name—Mrs. Cashmere—has lately eloped with ‘the wild Irishman’ as we used to call him, a regular harum-scarum, with plenty of money, and nothing to do. There were men who might have spoken then, and perhaps lightened your son’s supposed disgrace in your eyes. But, sir, a man’s lips are sealed where a woman is concerned, and Reg never expected a word of that kind to be spoken on his behalf.”

Mr. Dunsmere sighed. “Perhaps I was hard on him, Vernon. God knows, I have repented of the words I wrote to the lad hastily. But I was carried away by Cashmere’s undoubted evidence, and I knew him as a man of sterling integrity. I trust now that Reg was no worse than foolish after all.”

“We never gave him credit for anything unmanly, sir, and no one dared to assert anything derogatory to his character within hearing of the men of his regiment. I hope to see you both reconciled yet.”

“Please God, that may be, Vernon, before my time comes. But I fear there is very little hope of it while any doubt exists; for the lad will never come back till all is clear as sunshine.”

“All will come right, sir, in good time, I feel sure. Since arriving in Australia I feel as if I may meet him any day. And as I long to see his stern, manly face again, I can understand how you, his father, must yearn for the joyous greeting of an only son.”

As for Jack, he was soon enjoying himself immensely. Introduced right and left by Mr. Dunsmere, he found himself amongst splendid fellows, and especially did he take a liking to quiet George Melville.

He thoroughly enjoyed his visits to Rosebrook. Strolling with the proprietor over the rich clover paddocks, where were the stud sheep, wool to the toes, and only the white muzzle showing through the

dense fleeces that came down over the eyes. There, too, were the brood mares, each with a history, and their blood-like foals, and he felt at home in the loose boxes beside Thunderbolt, Gladiator and Mameluke. The hounds, too, looked splendid. They were bred from strains of the Duke of Beaufort's pack, and fit for any hunt in the kingdom. So thought the visitor.

George, seeing that Vernon was an enthusiast in hunting matters, offered to "mount" him while he was in the district. "He might ride Gladiator just to get an idea what an Australian hunting field was like. They would meet on Saturday next to hunt a stag."

Jack sincerely thanked him for his kind offer, saying that Mr. Dunsmere had mentioned the matter to him, offering him Sarchedon for the run, with a regret that the horse was not in hunting condition as yet, having only recently been taken up.

He had accepted Mr. Dunsmere's kind offer, but with that gentleman's concurrence he would prefer to ride Gladiator, as he was particularly anxious to see as much of a run in the Colonies as his horsemanship would permit, supposing that he would find following the hounds over timber-fenced country somewhat different to the fox hunting he had been accustomed to in England.

Once he spoke to George Melville regarding Reg Dunsmere, who had been his particular chum. And George joined with him in wishing that the breach between father and son would yet be healed, promising to write to his Queensland manager, and acquaint him with particulars which might lead to Dunsmere's identification should he visit that portion of Australia, as so many younger sons did. More than one good story of his friend's skill and daring in the saddle, and coolness in the face of danger when big jungle game was afoot, had Vernon to relate for his companion's edification; and so with stories of adventure by flood and field, in the hunting fields of the



old land and the forests of the new, were their rides and drives together leavened, while Jack drank in the beauties of Australian scenery and breathed the clear fresh air under the glorious sunshine of our own fair land.

Together they visited The Priory, and passed, to use Vernon's words, a "very pleasant afternoon."

Mrs. Dalgleish was always a perfect hostess, and had a charming way with her that would thaw to amiability the heart of the crustiest and most unsympathetic misanthrope, while others, figuratively of course, fell down straightway and worshipped.

In Miss Maitland, Vernon found an old acquaintance, for his father and the late Colonel Maitland had been college chums in the old years, and firm friends afterwards. Once, when on a visit to London, the old gentleman had brought his daughter with him. How glad Miss Maitland was to meet Vernon, and her pleasure was still greater when she learned he was in the 55th.

Had not poor Jack Danvers been in the same regiment at one time, exchanging only when the prospect of some fighting made him seek the Zulu campaign in order that he might win his spurs; for Jack had to fight his way up, if he rose at all; ancestral possessions came without a struggle to the eldest son. Well Danvers knew that there was one who would wait for him through shadow and shine; and he was right in his belief, for through the dark valley of the shadow of death his beloved was true to him still.

Vernon said to himself as the light gig rattled homewards, "So this is Australia, the land of the blacks! Gad! I wonder I never thought of looking it up before! Why it beats foggy old England all to smoke for climate, and as for the people, why half of them *are* English, and the other half, if Melville here's a sample, beat the known world! There's no mistaking the quality and endurance of their cattle, and

therefrom one may safely venture an opinion that their sport, 'when we all go a hunting to-day,' is of a very high-class order."

As the good horse trotted merrily along over the sound turf by the roadside, Melville gave the visitor an account of their great meeting—the Western Steeplechase—with anecdotes of the horses and men who had taken part in its glories; all of which tended to make Vernon eager for the Saturday to come, and with it the meet of the Westerton pack, with which the flower of the Western district, human and equine, were wont to assemble.

Meanwhile, Mr. Fred Melville's escape from custody, although some months had passed since the event, was not forgotten by the community at large. Many a time the subject was discussed, and all were glad that he had got safely and quietly away. He had been heard of, so rumour said, in India, where he was doing some extraordinary pig-sticking in company with the officers of the 99th. Another returned Australian had caught a glimpse of him at Epsom, where he had won no end of money over Orme's victory. He was heard of in Japan also, where it was averred he had a yacht, and was altogether enjoying his exile immensely.

An Australian had been astonishing the Irish hunting men by his exploits in the saddle with the Wicklow hounds, and not a few said, on hearing this, "That's Fred Melville for a certainty! By Jove, he'll set them a dance when the 'little red-rover' gives the pack a merry tune to follow. Shouldn't wonder if he hasn't taken old Dangerous with him."

But George Melville said only, "I'm glad he is not shut up in prison at any rate."

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE HORSE THIEVES

SEVERAL times during the course of this chronicle, mention has been made of Heywood Downs Station. It is situated on the Porro Borro water, and about twenty miles westward from Lake Melville Station. The site for the homestead was prettily chosen on the summit of a gentle tree-crowned rise, sloping on the one side to the river, and on the other trending gently downwards to the blue waters of a sandy-shored lake.

The brothers—George and Norman Mostyn—were hard-working fellows, grand hands amongst cattle, and firm believers in an outlay on good improvements on their runs, and with stock it was the same. Their cattle were well bred, and consequently of good colours, and always sold well in the Southern markets as fats, or stores. Their horses were of extra quality, Panic blood being largely used on the station on account of the size and endurance of that breed. It was said by men, who ought to know, that if the Mostyns' horses were put into the market, the culls would fetch more than the best drafts from other stations, the brand had such a name in the two colonies. The weediest looking often showed great endurance, and more than one cast off, for lack of size,

had left his mark on the turf in the settled districts after leaving the station.

The Mostyns were all good horsemen. It seemed to run in the family. They had never taken to the turf, although enthusiastic on the merits of a good one under the saddle, and fond of hunting when that sport came in their way, but no amount of public money would induce them to train a horse for the love of gain, though for the sake of sport they were always ready for a gallop.

Since the Rev. brother's arrival he had been of great assistance to them on the station. From his active, energetic habits he was always an early riser, and ready to take his seat in the saddle after the morning meal, and do his share of the mustering with the rest.

No whisper of the affair at Westerton had reached the men on the station. Although O'Malley, who was in manner most reticent, may have mentioned that James Mostyn was a clergyman there; if so they did not now enquire why he was not a minister there still; for, as they said among themselves—"What need had he to be a clergyman? Were not the Mostyns wealthy men, both here and in Victoria? He might do as he well liked."

They were not left long in doubt as to James Mostyn's sincerity with regard to the calling he had chosen, for, on the second Saturday evening of his sojourn on the station, he had said to the men in the hut: "Lads, in Victoria I have had the honour to be a settled clergyman of the Church of England. Circumstances have arisen which render it necessary for me to resign my charge for a time; but although I am not now settled, still I wish to carry on my ministrations as a servant of the Lord God. As most of you are aware, my brothers and self are well endowed with worldly goods by inheritance, therefore it is not with any desire to enrich myself (as some who have a pre-

judice against the cloth aver is the case with clergymen) that I have taken up the Master's cross to follow Him. Nor is it so with many others who preach of a Saviour, to whom it has been to my benefit to listen and learn instruction, denying themselves in many cases the luxuries of life in order that they might follow Him the more closely, and counting themselves poor that they might become heirs to the inheritance of the riches of the love of Christ.

"A man need not fear to employ the gifts that have been given to him because of religion. You are requested 'in whatsoever ye do to do it with all your might.' If the bent of your inclination lies in the tending of cattle or sheep, making you clever in the performance of duties pertaining thereto, neglect not that gift. Remember that the sheep are His and 'the cattle on a thousand hills,' and He must needs have some one to look after them with a fondness for His creatures.

"He (Mostyn) was fond of horses. They were one of God's greatest gifts to men, assisting him in the carrying out of the work that is given him to do. Still at times they were cruelly illused. Horseracing was a degrading pastime. Horses were, for the pleasure of the onlookers and their owner's greed of gain, beaten cruelly and cut with the spurs in its pursuit. It was like the goading of the bulls with darts in the Spanish amphitheatre, a sport at which we affect to shudder. Hunting was a more rational amusement, and often apparently as much enjoyed by the horse as his rider; still, even there, generous horses were often carried beyond their powers by the application of whip and spur. Let a man have a good horse and treat him kindly, and he would find in him a faithful servant, besides being able to furnish his master with healthful recreation, for a well kept horse could enjoy an occasional romp as well as his rider.

"What he had come to say to them was simply this: he deemed it his duty to the God whom he served to say a few words in His behalf when opportunity occurred, and so, if they came up to the homestead on Sunday morning, he would be pleased to give them a short address from the Bible."

Old Bill, the hut-keeper, spoke and said, "Sir, we thank you for your kind offer. For myself, I have not heard a sermon for years, although in my youth, as to many others of us, the Scriptures were familiar. We have seen enough of you, sir, since your coming to the station to note that one may be a Christian and yet an athlete, muscular and manly. For my part I will be glad to attend." And the others said, "Thanks, sir; we will, too."

This was the beginning of the little congregation that gathered round the Rev. Jim on the Sunday forenoons; for although he had left for a time the people who regularly listened to his preaching, yet he did not intend to neglect the sacred obligations that he felt himself under though far out in the wild bush.

The clergyman frequently stayed out at Bael Paël. This was an out-station connected with the run where the breeding cattle were kept, and the young horses and mares. Long Jack had been promoted to the charge of it, for he was much liked and trusted by the Mostyns, and deservedly so, for he was a steady-going fellow, a rare hand amongst stock, and tireless in the saddle.

The Rev. Jim liked "Quiet John," as Jack was sometimes nicknamed, and enjoyed a chat with him, or a ride across the run with Jack as pilot. It was pleasant to ride beside him amongst the horses. Jack would rein up and say, in answer to an enquiry, "that colt's a son of Vanguard, from Norma, by Ferryman; or that mare with the white face is Elsie, by Croagh Patrick; or this is old Muslin, by Warhawk, she is said to have been a great performer in her day."

And so on, for he knew all about the horses, and could tell each one almost as far off as he could see it, so much did he love the thoroughbred.

One day as they were ambling along over the run, going out to see some cattle at the Brigalows—a far camp—the black boy jogging along in the rear suddenly exclaimed, “Hi, Masr! that feller bin ride im yarraman longa here, bin lead im nuther feller Sandboy, mine thinkit. I bin see cowfoot bclonga him.”

Yes, sure enough. Some distance away from the station horses’ beat were three parallel horse tracks, going in a straight direction. Jingler was right. They were ridden, sure enough, two of these horses, the other track zigzagged a little, evidently jogging occasionally as a led horse will while the others walked. Further, the led animal had evidently a piece missing out of the front hoof similar to that of Sandboy, the result of a stake which had necessitated his being turned out on the run for a spell. Sandboy was one of Jack’s favourites.

“By Jove! that’s Sandboy’s track, and no mistake. I’ve followed those tracks too often when camping out to be misled now. These horse thieves have given us a call again. It’s probably the men who took Sluggard, and stuck up Bringelabra. Here goes for a chase! Must have a crack at them this time for the old horse’s sake! How long gone, Jingler?”

Looking closely at the tracks where the horses had gone through a shallow puddle of water, the result of a recent thunderstorm, it was observable that the fluid was thick almost to the surface with brown earth held in solution still, and that the bubbles on the edges of the hoofprints were not yet all dissolved. Therefore both horsemen quickly coincided with the black fellow’s “Not long, Masr, soon kitch ’im that feller.”

“I’m with you, Jack,” said Mostyn, and so saying at a sign Jingler raced off with the lead on the trail,

and the two men raced after him side by side. The ground was soft from the recent rain storm, and the going extra heavy in places, so that the tracks they followed were quite distinct. They could see a mile ahead of them over the lightly timbered downs, but there were in that space of country no horsemen in sight. Over that, and they struck the timbered ground where the going was better. Both men felt the blood course swiftly through their veins in the excitement of the chase. They well knew that if they were on the track of the desperadoes who had stuck up Bringelabra, those ruffians were well armed. Jack never thought of the consequences. He meant to grapple with them, win, tie or wrangle, rather than lose Sandboy; and to Mostyn the chase was for a righteous cause. He gloried also in

“The measured stroke on elastic sword,  
Of the steed three parts extended  
Hard held, the breath of his nostrils broad  
With the golden ether blended,”

and knew no fear.

The Gidya belt was only a narrow one, and soon they struck the open downs again. As they did so Jingler pulled back suddenly, pointing forward with his finger.

“By crikey, Sandboy all right!” And sure enough about two hundred paces in front of them rode two horsemen, one leading Jack’s favourite brown. At the same instant, wakening to the sound of galloping hoofs to rearward, Sandboy sprang forward the length of his halter, with head up and eyes endeavouring to glance backward. Translating the signal in a moment, a black bushy bearded face looked round, and with an oath shouted to his mate, “The traps, Jim,” and driving in his heels, raced off with his companion at a wild gallop. The game was afoot with a ven-



geance. Cramming his hat down on his head, and thrusting his feet further home in the stirrups, Jack shook his horse up, and, rising in the saddle as if the hounds were streaming away, he gave a view halloo, that had lain silent for many a year, loud and clear ; and with his comrade racing neck and neck with him, rode at the utmost speed of his horse.

The joys of the chase are strong in mankind, and still stronger when the game is made worth the playing by the presence in it of real danger. Each could note as he raced along, a rifle slung across the back of each rider in front, and a revolver pouch hanging to the belt, yet their horses were crammed and ridden with hand and heel in the endeavour to draw closer to the flying foe. They had gained slightly in the first rush, but were now scarcely holding their own. The marauders' horses were evidently good, and fresher by far than those of their pursuers, which had already galloped fully three miles at a strong pace. The leader of the party was mounted on a fine up-standing roan which galloped well within himself, though the others were going at their best pace.

"It's no use, Jack, my mare is in trouble, and yours is nearly done. They're beginning to draw away."

"Let the horse go!" yelled Jack, but still the thieves pushed on.

Putting his hand under his coat and releasing his heavy army and navy revolver (still a constant companion though it had so nearly brought him to grief) from the shoulder strap, Mostyn pointed it over his horse's ears. It had rarely failed in times of peace, would it waver now in the hour of necessity? Crack, crack, crack went three reports in rapid succession, and at the third Sandboy's bridle fell from the robber's hand. He uttered at the same time a loud exclamation, and made as if to draw his revolver, but desisted, for a red stain on the white cords showed that he had been hit on the hand.

At the first report the leader's roan horse bounded forward, and the other, freed from the led horse, also increased his pace.

"Good, sir ; beautiful. We've got the horse anyway !" ejaculated Jack as Sandboy's foot caught in the reins and brought him to a halt. "By Jove ! I'll give them a turn on him, d——d if I don't," said he, leaping hurriedly to the ground and unbuckling the girths of his saddle in great haste.

"No, Jack ; don't be foolish. They're well armed and two to one. My mare is too exhausted to follow further." And Mostyn laid his hand on his comrade's arm. It was all he could do to persuade the courageous fellow to desist from the pursuit, so fierce had he become now his blood was up.

As they freed their tired horses, having captured Sandboy, Jack said, "I have been longing for a spin after that scoundrel ever since he took Sluggard and tried for Cottesmore, just as eagerly as one looks for a chase after a dingo, and now I've had it, and lost ! Perhaps it's as well though, I might not have got within arm's length of him after all," he added with a laugh, thinking of the weapons the bushranger carried. "You touched him, sir ; for he dropped the reins instantly. And I noticed a red stain where he tried for the pistol."

"Yes, Jack, I fired a little wide the first shot, thinking the man might let the horse go ; but as he did not, the other shots were directed at the hand that held the led horse's rein. It was necessary to do so, or we should have lost the horse. We would probably have had a shot directed at us were it not that both the man's hands were occupied with the horses, and doubtless afterwards he could not grasp the pistol comfortably. His comrade seemed not at all inclined to be offensive. Did you notice, Jack, what happened after Sandboy was freed ? Little show we had of catching him ! He let his horse's head go, and in

three or four strides had shot away from his mate as if he was standing still. The police will never catch him by fast galloping, that's certain."

Returning immediately to the out-station, a messenger was forwarded without delay to the homestead, from there to Lake Melville, and thence to the Police depôt at Wirrildi. But Captain Ayre and his merry men, the Black Trackers, were away investigating the circumstances surrounding the sticking up of Coongoon Wirrni station, where the shopkeeper had been wounded in the arm by a shot fired by one of the bushrangers as he was reaching for his revolver.

It was evident that the robbers were good bushmen, a regular flying gang in fact, as they were reported here, there and everywhere within a few days.

There was considerable stir at Lake Melville when news of the occurrence at Bael Bael came to hand. Jimmy Don was for forming a posse of stockmen and going in immediate pursuit, inwardly urged to do so from Jack's supposition that Sluggard carried the second man of the band. The fighting blood was roused within him, and he longed to have a "lash," as he put it, at the gang.

"Useless, Don," said the manager, "quite useless! They have by this time reached the Black Range, and you know you might as well follow a wallaby on foot there as one of these bushmen. Keep well armed, men, and be careful of suspicious characters; for, unless I am greatly mistaken, we have not seen the last of the vagabonds yet."

The advice had its effect. The men had faith in their leader and actually longed for the bushrangers to visit the station, firmly believing that it would be their last raid. Mr. Vincent was, as one would infer, getting on remarkably well on the station. The men liked him. He thought out his schemes well, and consequently when he set anything going there was not likely to be any stoppage for want

of foresight. Although somewhat taciturn, seldom engaging in conversation with any one, besides being in appearance too much of a swell for a cattle man, still he got about so rapidly with his black boy, and gave his orders so cheerfully, being always ready to note when the men had gone through some extra hardship and to regulate the subsequent work accordingly, overlooking a slight occasional fault (though a martinet for prompt obedience), having already discovered that it is impossible for human beings to be without failings, probably, that they got along very well together, and enjoyed having him out with them in a fast piece of work. New chum he certainly looked still, but that first morning's quiet mastery over Maelstrom and the subsequent subjugation in the same gentle manner of Sweetlips and Captain Slasher, showed them plain enough that he was cool, determined, and courageous, at the outset, and his tireless feats in the saddle, and excellent performances on the cattle camps, placed him in a most favourable light with them. Jimmy Don could never quite understand him. He lived at the homestead entirely alone, pleading pressure of work as an excuse for not visiting his neighbours, and was usually out on the run when any one called during the day. He gave Don a resumé of the work to be done, and listened attentively to the latter's enunciation of ideas, but his speeches were of the briefest description. Only once did he come out of his shell and pose as an orator—that was when speaking, at a general meeting that had been called for the purpose of forming a Pic-nic Race Club in the district, in support of the motion. The speech given in the drawling tones for which Vincent was noted, was often afterwards quoted with as near an approach to his style as could be arrived at, and seldom failed to bring down the house. It was—

“Gentlemen,—I have vewy much pleasaw in speak-

ing on this motion, er. Hawse wacing, as it is usually cawied out, is a disgwace to the countwy. The noble animal is fwequently made the medium of low swindles by unscqupulous men, er. Pic-nic wacing, as pwoposed, does away with this. At Weltah weights an ownah may wide his own hawse-ah. And as no money pwizes will be given, only those who aw lovahs of the spawt will engage. The wesidents of this distwict, from their intimacy with hawses, aw at home in the saddle in a mahked mannah. And the cattle bred heah cannot be excelled for the puhpose undah considewation. I therfaw cawdially suppwat the motion that a pic-nic wace club be formed."

Mr. Vincent being evidently a sportsman at heart, and moreover one of the straightgoing sort, was then and there elected a member of committee, and the approaching meeting became the theme of conversation, alternating with speculations as to the next appearance of the bushrangers.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE MEET OF THE HOUNDS

"TIME waits for no man." It was therefore impossible for anyone to have put spikes in the wheels of his chariot, and so retarded the coming of this Saturday which was notified as the date on which the Westerton hounds would meet. Nor could any mortal prevent the genial sun from lending his aid, and with kindly smiles inviting one and all to venture forth on such a pleasant afternoon to the meet of the hounds.

Those of the pleasure-seekers who had no conveyance went afoot, while those who had a vehicle at their service made use of it on the occasion, and others who preferred a seat in the saddle, and owned a horse, and they were many that day, rode to the meet.

This is a great day, for a certain high dignitary has elected to visit this part of his principality because of the wonderful richness of the pastures which has made it famous, and brought in untold wealth to the government coffers. Besides, there is a great irrigation scheme afoot by which a vast extent of the Mallee country is to be fertilized, and many thousands of people settled thereon.

The leading men had given their visitor a great dinner the previous evening and, as opportunity offered, laid before him a statement of the value of

the products of the district, whilst making known their various schemes for its further advancement.

The guest in replying stated that he had always heard the district spoken of as the garden of Victoria, and from the apparent extraordinary richness of the soil, its grasses, and general fertility, he agreed that the appellation was no misnomer. He praised the sheep which had been inspected by him, the cattle he had seen, and also the horses, of the excellence of which he was always hearing so much. He had a great fondness of horses himself, and was pleased to note that the right sort were bred on the surrounding pastures—horses showing size and quality; eminently fitted for remount purposes, for carriage work, or as hacks and hunters, for which latter he had an especial fondness. He had heard that the hounds were to meet on the morrow, and felt that it would give him very much pleasure to be present, though he regretted that he would be unable on this occasion to take further part in the run.

The intimation to be present, on the part of one in such an exalted position, was an additional incentive to sightseers to come forward; albeit the real workmen were more rejoiced at the prospect of hunting a stag, which the Master had caused to be marked down in the neighbourhood, and wanted no additional charm.

In due course, accordingly, a large concourse arrived at the rendezvous. The visitor seated on the box seat, and handling the reins of the four thoroughbreds in the Blythe's drag like a tradesman, was early present, and a very great many of the neighbouring gentry with their fair kinsfolk and acquaintance also duly arrived on wheels. The Melville's roomy sociable is familiar to us. Mrs. Melville has with her two young ladies who are staying at Rosebrook. The equipage, with its powerful pair of heavy-bitted, sleek-coated, bang-tailed browns looks fit to grace The Row

in the height of the season. Mrs. Dalglish, Miss Maitland, and another lady are in the pony carriage, and, besides enjoying a view of the meet will see a good deal of the run, for they know the lay of the country well, and the ponies are fast and active. The Blythes, Robertsons, Murrays, Footes, etc., have all turned out, and, in honour of the occasion, Mr. Dunsmere is to-day driving his big browns, high stepping and spirited, in the drag in which are seated Miss Dunsmere, Miss Vernon, now looking almost as happy as a country girl, and Jack Vernon. Miss Dunsmere is not in the saddle on this occasion, she does not seem so cheerful as of yore. Her face wears a sad wistful expression as she notes the silken coat of the powerful brown Gladiator undergoing a light dressing, ere the saddle is placed on his back by his fond attendant, little Patsy, and thinks of his beloved master, an outcast on the face of the earth. She is glad with Miss Vernon to go for a few minutes and sit beside Mrs. Melville to receive the warm kindly pressure of her hand, and feel the soft kiss on her cheek that speaks expressively of the mother's sympathy in her bitter trial.

Vernon loses little time in throwing off his overcoat, and, after visiting the Melville's carriage to pay his devoirs, is thence escorted by George Melville to where the grooms await with the saddled horses.

The distinguished visitor has meanwhile dismounted from the drag and is renewing his acquaintance with the men of whom he was guest the previous evening, and is by them introduced to the fair occupants of the carriages.

He will carry away with him pleasant recollections of the western side when returning to the metropolis. Melville, as M.F.H., introduces him to the "flyers of the hunt," those horses which he was so particularly anxious to see, and well worthy they were of inspection, and then, with the pride of a true sportsman



gleaming on his face, turns to the spot where are grouped his peerless beauties—the hounds. They surround him quickly, each seeming eager for a kindly word, which is not long forthcoming. There they are, fawn, black and white, waving tails, red tongues, and merry looking eyes, all intermingled and yet so even in size. See the gleam of mirth on the faces of Harmony, Haste, and Happy Jack, Babblers, Bouncer and Bowlin', the ringleaders of the pack, as their names are spoken, and watch them to-day in the field, if you are good enough to be in the first flight, and say if their master's tribute of praise is undeserved ; it is—"They shirk at nothing, and run true as steel !"

Now the scene indeed looks gay, for overcoats have been discarded, and redcoats gleam in the sunshine rugs have been removed and massive hunters, "all polish and lustre," show caparisoned for the field.

It is evident from the commotion near the Blythes' carriage that some of the ladies who came therein are going to share in the joys of the chase. Certainly! there is Merrimac, Miss Blythe's grand old favourite, waiting for the word. There, too, is a stranger, the new owner of The Wilderness station, so report goes, lengthening his stirrups. Rumours had it that this gentleman has brought up his hunters with him from the city, and sure enough two powerful strange horses are there, equipped for the fray. One is having a lady's saddle and light bit and bridoon put on him and resents the girthing-up process by lashing out at his attendant, and showing his white teeth. He has a temper without doubt, and although a beauty, as far as conformation goes, is not the sort of horse many ladies would care to ride.

Jack Vernon is fully engrossed with the contemplation of the grand animal he is to ride, and has fitted curb and leathers to his entire satisfaction. He has just cast his eye over the field and notes the quality

of the horses and the workmanlike appearance of the men, satisfying himself at a glance that it must take no end of horsemanship, as well as a perfect mount, to live through a long run with them. Presently the word is given—"To horse!" and the hounds are treated to a few turns round the green, and then a general move is made along the roadway, the Master leading the cavalcade on his good black followed by the pack and the whips. Then come the followers of the hunt in their bright scarlet, and after them vehicles and horsemen—a great number. Faces are turned to right and left as the country is scanned and the probable destination of the stag discussed.

Old Micky has been in the vicinity since daybreak, and is still as reliable as ever when a quarry has to be marked down. Here he is. With a pull at his battered old hat, he remarks, holding up his hand, "Whisht, sir, whisht. Not a worrud, yer anner! Shure, it's a beauty's rishtin' in thim wattles forninst yez! Och, but yez'll have the great run, and good luck to yer anner!"

Holding up his hand as a signal for the followers to halt, Melville orders Micky to rouse the game, and thitherward proceeds, at a shambling gait, the old man and his keen intelligent little Skye terrier, Piper.

The sharp admonitions of the whips to the pack are heard five minutes later when little Piper's yelp, yelp, comes on the breeze, and they become eager to proclaim the find. Moving forward at a steady pace the throng are ready for action. Presently there is a whimper of delight from Minstrel, and a wild cry of joy from Harmony, taken up by the whole pack, and as they speed away to the cheery exhortations of the whips, the game is afoot. In go the redcoats over a two-railer bordering the road without mishap. As Vernon feels Gladiator skip over the obstacle, he knows that the brown does not belie his appearance. Two ladies, Miss Blythe and the fair stranger on the

big brown, sail over it in beautiful style, and all settle down to business, for the hounds are running with their noses up, so plain is the scent.

Turning at right angles with their present course, those hunting on wheels turned into a lane running parallel with the direction of the hunt. From the course that the hounds are pursuing it is evident that the deer did not seek for shelter in the dense western forests, but had turned his head for the low range of stony eastern hills which lay on the opposite side of the river, over the tops of which, afar in the distance, could be seen the white, sun-kissed rock faces of the Grampian Ranges, set in a blue haze, and thitherward would hasten the deer when pressed by his pursuers, for from thence he had come.

In full view of the road-riders could be seen the mottled colours of the flying hounds, while anon on the breeze came from their course a burst of melody. Close with them came the redcoats, clearing the fences on their line like a field of steeplechasers.

It was noticeable that the strange lady with her cavalier rode slightly wide on the right and well in the van, pulling back at nothing, and that abreast of them went the black horse of the Master and the brown hunter of his friend. Once more diverging from their course, the field swung down towards the roadway, and fairly in front of the carriages raced for the big double at the lane. The merry music of the hounds enlivened man and horse as nearer and nearer it came, till at last the pack burst through the rails of the fence, racing joyously across the road, and leaping and climbing over the opposite wall. There was little time to spare with such a scent. Dufrocq and Dalrymple rode close to their flying favourites, as they always did, "through shadow and shine," and with them raced Thunderbolt, Gladiator, and Merri-mac, beautifully ridden by his fair owner. About twenty dauntless redcoats were in close order, and

still on the right wing rode the strange lady and her companion.

On the roadway a halt had been called, and the spectators gazed with eager eyes to see one of the prettiest sights the run afforded. First the intermingled colours of the eager tumultuous pack, their reiterated chorus and musical refrain; then the clear, faultless leaping of the flyers of the hunt, the eager strides of the horses across the roadway, and the flying bounds that exhibited white girths and glittering shoes for an instant ere landing them safely over the opposite wall. A ringing cheer greeted the performance of the fair stranger as the big brown, with ears flung forward and mouth wide open, rushed the first fence and flung it yards behind, standing far off from the next and clearing it "like-a bird," his rider leaning backward in the saddle, dropping her hands to the strong strain of the horse's head as he struck the springing turf, and yet keeping him steadily together all through. In half a minute all the followers were over and away, leaving only long shoecut slides in the turf where the horses had bent to their haunches for the spring, and deep indentations in the loose loam, where they had lit over the fences, to mark where the hunt had been.

Whipping up their horses again, the road cavalcade swept on, catching glimpses of the field now and again as they ascended a rise, or raced over the level pastures of the open country.

Ay! the stag's course was for the far away Ranges. He would just lave his sides in the sparkling waters of the river, and away again. That was his move, certainly, for now could be seen down the valley the winding, tree-sheltered course of the stream, with its rocky banks trending at right angles with the line of the chase.

Fast was the burst, and fast the pace continued to be. Already two riderless horses were galloping to-

wards the carriages, reins and stirrups flapping loose, and, coming from the direction of yonder high wall could be seen the scarlet coats of two dismounted horsemen hurrying after them across the green. Nothing would stop the onward course of the hunt save the taking of the stag or the falling of night.

Jack Vernon was enjoying the run immensely. Racing close up to them with the Master, he was able to note, with the true sportsman's spirit, the faultless working of the pack, whilst rejoicing in being astride of the most perfect fencer he had ever ridden. Yes! on the strong back of Gladiator he felt himself a man to whom nothing was impossible. The bold horse raced over the level with perfect rhythmical action, or rose from the springy turf in a bound like the yielding elasticity of an India rubber ball. Vernon now knew the horse and would ride his own line, watching the movements of the hounds. Here was the river before him, and down the steep bank raced the pack, and on through the shallow water urged by huntsmen and whips. Vernon noticed that as soon as they reached the opposite bank the hounds swung towards the right, and altered his course somewhat so as to cut off an angle, though the foremost hunt riders veered slightly towards the left. The lady and gentleman, who like himself were strangers to the country, noting the line of the pack, also accommodated themselves to it, and led Vernon down the steep bank into the water, going straight up the opposite almost precipitous side. On its summit, on the margin of the grass land, was a small limestone cliff about two feet high. Up the bank went the big brown ridden by the lady, displacing a quantity of loose stones that went clattering down to the water, in his eagerness to be with the hounds again. Rearing up to surmount the last obstacle, his hind foot slipped on a flat stone; a sudden whipstroke down the shoulder flurried him into making a wild effort

to reach the top of the rock, instead of which the other foothold gave way. Pawing the air for an instant wildly in the effort to regain his footing, he sank backwards with a groan of discomfiture, and rolling over his rider went back into the water. Vernon, making the ascent with more caution, resolving to make up for lost time when the level was reached, as was the other horseman to the left, saw the accident which happened in a second or two of time, and flinging the reins over his horse's head, hurried to the lady's assistance, as did the other gentleman, uttering an agonised cry, for the lady lay motionless where she fell. Thinking of nought else but the dangerous accident that had occurred, Jack assisted his companion to carry the unconscious lady up on to the grassy sward, where she lay with her white still face upturned to the sky. Jack gave a start of astonishment and rose to his full height speechless, turning his face as he did so towards the man who was making of his coat a pillow, while exclaiming eagerly, "Get help, for God's sake, sir!"

"What, you here? And her, Con!"

As if he had been suddenly struck, Bingham started and stood up looking full in his companion's face for a few seconds, while seeming to collect his thoughts, then said, "Vernon! Jack! By all that's holy; quick, Jack, quick!"

But Vernon did not wait for the order. He was on his horse, and with a scramble reached the top of the opposite bank, there rising in his stirrups, as if finishing in a race on the flat, while the brown horse, ridden out, seemed fairly to fly, he struck across for the roadway where he judged the carriages would appear; but ere he reached it, he saw a solitary carriage coming at speed across the paddock towards the scene of the accident, which at a glance he knew to be that of Mr. Dunsmere, with its fair occupants. As he reached it, he exclaimed—

"There has been a serious accident, sir. A lady met with a bad fall in ascending the rocky bank of the river."

"Ay, Vernon, we were watching your flight on the brown, fearing that you would make the very mistake you fell into, when you should have crossed higher up where the banks are of turf, and saw only one horse, riderless, going away on the opposite side, although three had gone down the bank. Hurry up, Simpson, as fast as they can go!" and away went the carriage at a gallop, which had scarcely been slackened to hear Vernon's intelligence, so sure was the old gentleman of an accident. A horseman, who had also feared an accident from seeing the riderless horse and the returning redcoat, ranged alongside of the carriage, and as he did so, Mr. Dunsmere called out, "A lady has been seriously injured by a fall. Send Dr. Shrapwel to The Gums without loss of time. We will at once convey the lady thither."

Arrived at the scene of the accident, they found Bingham kneeling by the side of the prostrate figure, with grief depicted on his face, holding up the motionless gold-crowned head.

"Thank you, sir," he said, as Mr. Dunsmere placed his carriage at his disposal, saying,—

"There is a bye-road from here to my homestead, The Gums, about three miles distant. We will convey the lady thither at once. I have taken upon myself the responsibility of sending for a doctor."

"She has never opened her eyes. I fear it is a serious injury," said Bingham, and the poor fellow's face was pale as death from the gravity of his fears. The ladies chafed the white wrists, and acted according to their ambulance class instructions in such cases. There were no marks of disfigurement on the still features. Nothing, only the heavy breathing, told that there was cause for alarm; so that even their sensitive natures did not shrink from this duty. Nay

rather were they drawn towards the sufferer, like true women, who would bear a share of the pain themselves if they could alleviate another's distress. Then quickly making a couch in the carriage with the cushions and their shawls, the men placed the unconscious form therein, and Bingham supported the motionless head while the horses were driven rapidly towards home.

Jack Vernon, catching the big brown horse, the cause of the accident, where he cropped the green grass by the water, considerably cut by the stones in his roll, was fortunate enough to observe at a distance a road-rider returning with a led horse, Bingham's hunter, and, possessing himself of it also, rode quickly after the carriage.

His brain was like a kaleidoscope during that ride. Thoughts, with their accompanying pictures, flashed across it with the rapidity of forest leaves in the swirl of a whirlwind. The lady of all others whom he least expected to see, injured by a fall from her horse, and himself and Con Bingham her attendants in a far Australian hunting field! Then his thoughts flew to Reg Dunsmere, and here was she who had been the cause of his old friend's exile in the very same vehicle as his sister and loved one and brave old father! Verily Jack was amazed. He felt as if Reg was drawing nearer to him. Surely something would eventuate that would plead for his old comrade, something that would show him to others in the same clear light as he himself had never ceased to regard him, by noontide or by night. Yet he feared that the injury might be serious to the fair frail woman, and felt pity for her. He did not regret losing the splendid run that George Melville described to him afterwards; how that they had run the stag on across the lengthening shadows of the honeysuckle, the wattle, and the gum, till at dusk they had taken him in a rocky pool at the foot of the Ranges, only seven



of the hounds being lost, though the run was thirty miles. Thunderbolt and four other horses only saw the finish, and they were housed in a shed under wool-packs and old blankets. Each man was his own groom that night, rubbed down his good horse, and fed him on the boundary rider's sweet, fresh, wheaten hay, of which he gave them no stint, assisting at the watering, feeding, and bandaging of the horses and attention to the hounds, for love of the sort of cattle that the fates had kindly sent to gladden his heart in that lone solitude. Afterwards the riders quaffed the dark ration tea, and ate of the corned mutton and damper, set before them by the silent old cook, with greater relish than ever they had done of the red Rhine wine and *paté-de-foie-gras* of the rich man's table. What a merry time they had round the roaring fire in the big chimney-place, and what hunting yarns were told! Their host, quiet and reserved at first, proved to be one of themselves. His father had been an M.F.H., and his grandfather before him had on his death-bed said these words as he breathed his last, "Saddle me Matchem, John! I see a fox! I see a fox!" And now the bronzed, wiry exile, thawed into good fellowship by the camaraderie of the men who were his guests, had his share of adventures by flood and field to relate. To "the little brown horse down the paddock" more than one allusion was made. "You will see him in the morning," said he, "but I ask you not to make me an offer for him. He is all that is left to me of the loves of old, though he never shared a gallop with the pack; yet I can imagine occasionally, as we are doing a gallop across country alone, that life has still some pleasures left."

On leaving in the morning, Melville hoped that he, as M.F.H., would have the pleasure some day of entertaining his host, and promised to mount him when he chose to attend the meet. But the latter thanked him, saying, "I must stick to duty out here 'till for-

tune smiles ' or I have to roll up again. I only hope that another stag, game as the last, will bring you here to me again, men, horses, and hounds."

They saw "the little brown horse down the paddock" do the in and out of the garden fence, ridden by his owner, with neither saddle nor bridle on, only a light brushy twig in his rider's hand, in the morning, and admired him then and there. Yes, that run would live long in the memory of more than one person, and be transcribed in red letters in the annals of the Westerton hunt for evermore.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### WITHIN THE VEIL

QUICKLY and quietly the injured lady was transferred from the carriage to a large comfortable room, the windows of which opened on to a wide verandah facing the carefully tended flower garden at The Gums, where she was watched over and ministered unto by Miss Vernon and Miss Dunsmere. To them she was Mrs. Bingham of The Wilderness, and if Jack Vernon thought he knew otherwise, he kept the knowledge to himself for the present. There was enough trouble in the house without his adding to it.

Dr. Shrapwel speedily arrived, and after carefully studying the injury, said with a serious face, "The lady has received a concussion of the brain, and it is certain from other indications that some injury to the spine has also resulted. It seems as if the cutch of the saddle caused the mischief when the horse rolled over. Meanwhile she must have the greatest quiet possible, nor must she be moved on any account. In two or three days we will know the worst."

Mr. Dunsmere, when he heard the doctor's advice, said in the kindest manner possible, in answer to Bingham's expression of regret at all the trouble he was causing the household at The Gums, "My dear sir, do not mention that. We are only glad to be of assistance to any one suffering. Be sure to regard

my house and servants as at your disposal till such time as the patient is in a condition to bear removal home ; which, for her own sake and with regard to your evident distress, will I trust be before many days are over."

Two days passed, and still the sufferer lay passive, moaning only occasionally, but as yet uttering no articulate words, during which time the ladies of the house came like angels of mercy to the room, smoothing the pillows and doing all that they could do to alleviate the sufferer's distress, eager to discover the first signs of returning animation.

Poor Con, wearied from long watching, but vigilant still, sat in a large armchair near the couch, waiting also for that return of consciousness as eager as "they that do watch the morning light to see."

At noon the next day she awoke from the sleep of darkness, and her eyes gazed in wonderment around the room, till they rested upon the patient watcher.

"Con, where are we? and why am I lying here in the daytime?"

"A bad fall over the rocks in the hunting-field, dear."

"Oh, I remember the meet, and racing over the fences with the hounds, but afterwards everything is blank. I seem to have fallen asleep during the run. Where are we now?"

"In a room at The Gums, to which you were kindly brought by the gentleman who is the proprietor of the station, in his carriage from the field. But do not distress yourself, dear. The doctor says you must keep perfectly quiet."

"Why, Con? I feel no pain; only a sense of numbness in my limbs, and a dizziness in the head. Did I not hear voices just now?"

"Yes; the ladies of the house have been very kind and attentive to you through it all. This is the third day since your accident, and they have scarcely left

your side during the whole time. Thank them yourself, dear."

At that moment Miss Dunsmere and Miss Vernon entered the room, and came smilingly forward, rejoiced to see the expression of returned consciousness on the pale, sweet face. Mrs. Bingham was in the act of thanking them with a smile on her lips, uplifting a white jewelled hand to meet that of Miss Dunsmere, when suddenly her hand fell to the coverlid, as her eyes met those of Miss Vernon, whose face was at Miss Dunsmere's shoulder. Gazing a moment as if horror-stricken, she covered her face with her hands, saying, "Take her away! Oh, take her away!" and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

The ladies, astonished at the sudden change in demeanour, and really fearing that the fall had so injured her head as to deprive her of reason, even as it had for a time robbed her of consciousness, sorrowfully withdrew.

Bingham was astonished. He, too, in no other way could understand her vehemence, and endeavoured to soothe her as one would a child. Presently, when she had somewhat recovered her equanimity, the lady said, "Oh, Con, who is that fair-haired girl? She is the living personification of Miss Vernon, old Judge Vernon's daughter. It *is* she, I am sure."

"Yes, dear, you are right. It is Miss Vernon; she has come out with her brother Jack, an old chum of mine. It was he who helped me carry you to the carriage. You are in Mr. Dunsmere's house"; and as he said the name, the thought struck him—Dunsmere? Surely not. Yes; he could understand it now! That affair of three years ago in London; and Reg Dunsmere, surely he too had lost his senses as the name had awakened no chord in his memory before this. Nay, but he had had no thought for anything else while she was in the valley of the shadow of death, though all now seemed clear.

"Oh, take me away at once, Con ; oh, take me away ! You do not know ! You do not know !" Making an effort to rise, she sank back with a shudder, and reverted to the former sad state, or worse, for while seemingly awake she knew no one, conversing with people whose presence no mortal eye could see, and laughing merrily betimes, as if sorrow and sighing were far away.

The doctor, on his arrival soon afterwards, hearing from Bingham the statement she had made as to the absence of pain, and noting her appearance calmly for a time, said, looking grave, "It is as I feared, sir ; your wife is in a dangerous state. Her physical helplessness and insensibility to pain indicate serious injury to the spine. She may live a day, and she may be an invalid for years."

"The wild Irishman," as they had called Con in the old land, belied his appellation, for he broke down as the last words were spoken, and sobbed like a child.

In order to explain Bingham's presence at Westerton, it is necessary to hark back some months to the time of his disappearance from the hunting field with Mrs. Cashmere. They had ridden straight away to one of the numerous railway stations in the vicinity, and thence by rail to the heart of the great city, where mid the crowds coming and going one is more completely lost than in an oasis of the desert. Bingham had immediately posted off to Ireland to settle his affairs, and make arrangements for a hurried departure to Australia, in pursuance of a pre-arrangement. While at Dublin, two days later, on looking over the morning's paper, he was shocked to see the report of Cashmere's death by his own hand, and rightly conjectured the motive that led to it. Hurrying back he found the widow had already learnt of the tragedy, and of the view that was taken of her own flight, and its influence on her husband's rash act. They were married hurriedly and sailed for Australia, where

Bingham thought in a country life he would lose his old identity, and make for his wife a comfortable home; and yet he had scarcely arrived when he was recognised by a man who knew him thoroughly in London; and here now was his wife in the very household where, a few years ago, she had caused so much sorrow. Verily the world is a small place after all!

After long mental wandering in strange lands, Mrs. Bingham again had a brief return to consciousness, and found her watchful husband still by her side.

"I have had such a strange dream, Con. I thought I was suffering punishment for something I had done of wrong. I felt as if kindness was being heaped upon me by hands which I hated, and was yet unable to resist, my limbs refusing to move, being by some invisible means chained or drugged into torpidity, while all my senses were doubly alive, suffering torments so terrible that one might only dream of them."

Again she looked around the room, and her fully awakened senses told her that her fancy was not all a dream.

"Con, dear, have I taken an opiate that makes my limbs refuse the guidance of volition, while yet my thoughts are free? Oh, would that they too could be wrapped in slumber. My God! Oh, my God!" And again she relapsed into insensibility, each heavy respiration telling to the trained ear of the medical man, who arrived a few minutes later, that the injury to the brain was reasserting itself.

"Sir," he said, "the worst is to be dreaded. There may be occasional gleams of consciousness, but I fear much that total paralysis will supervene, and then no mortal aid can avail."

Vernon was within call of the sick room, in order that he might be at hand should any assistance be required. He was therefore in readiness when Bingham called him from the hall, and told him in a sad

voice that the doctor feared the worst, that he could only hope for an occasional return to consciousness. Vernon expressed his great regret and sympathy with his old acquaintance in his trouble, saying that anything that Bingham could think of whereby he, Vernon, could be of service, would be cheerfully rendered by him.

"Vernon," said Con, "I would like, in your presence, to speak to Mr. Dunsmere, and acquaint him with the facts of the matter which is known to us. I do not like the idea of keeping him in the dark regarding our antecedents, now that I am aware of the identity of our kind host."

Accordingly, Mr. Dunsmere was sought out, and Bingham related to him all that we have already learnt, adding, "Sir, I hope you will pardon me for keeping silent hitherto, for I assure you that I was quite in ignorance of much that is now clear. I knew that Vernon here must be acquainted with much of my wild folly in England, but was not aware even of *your* name at first, so agitated was I, owing to my wife's distress, nor when I heard it did I connect you with the gentleman whose name was familiar to me once. You will understand, sir, how complicated matters really are. My wife, on returning to consciousness, recognised in Miss Vernon a lady whose presence, for some cause or other, distresses her, and in her present weak state she cannot be reasoned with."

"Pardon me, Bingham, for interrupting you," said Vernon, "for I think were you fully acquainted with the whole matter, and saw it in the same light as it now appears to me, you would scarcely be surprised at Mrs. Bingham's agitation in my sister's presence. I trust, however, that your wife will not suffer in mind in consequence of the discovery."

"Poor girl," said Con, "I'm thinking she's almost past pain, mental or physical, now."



"Bingham," said Mr. Dunsmere, who had listened in silence to his communication, "had you known all, and told me this at first, it would not have made the slightest difference in our treatment of Mrs. Bingham. As a lady commanding our aid and sympathy in her helpless condition, she would still have received our very best attention, and all the kindness that could be shown her. I feel very certain that my own dear daughter would have felt the same compassion for her that she now does, and Miss Vernon is too gentle and womanly to have allowed any unkind feelings to interfere with her loving administration to the wants of the injured lady. For myself, you can scarcely understand what a grievous wound your intelligence has re-opened, ay, a hurt that has located itself near the heart, for by it I suffer bitter estrangement from an only son! Make your mind easy, sir. All that the house can supply is at your disposal. With God's help, I trust that your wife will yet be restored to her wonted health and strength."

Bingham had expected a storm of reproach, and was unprepared for the kind Christian speech of his host, whose hand he clasped in silence, for the old man's voice had become broken from emotion.

After a long, tireless watch by the sick bed, towards midnight, while the doctor was in close attendance, there was a feeble call for Con. "It seems so lonely now, dear, and I am weary and longing for sleep. Are we two still lingering in the banqueting hall while the lights are dim? It seems so. Nay, I remember all. That face! that face! Yet it now seems as the face of an angel bearing me away in its arms, beyond the reach of pain and regret. Ah! I see clearer. It is no dream, for in her gentle arms my head lies comforted." So said she as Miss Vernon raised the shapely head, over which fell its coronal of filmy, soft spun, golden hair.

"Listen, dearest; I loved Reg Dunsmere once as

woman rarely loves. May I be forgiven! It was none of my seeking. It came to me as swift and vivid as the lightning by day, when I tried and tried to undo the bonds which were closing around me; and at night it entered into my soul when the senses were steeped in forgetfulness, by the wondrous witchery of dreams." And she sighed deeply at the recollection. "I saw how his eyes followed *you* through that crowded ballroom, and when he was missed from the circle, so were you also; then the jealousy that is 'cruel as the grave' took possession of me. You wonder at my speaking of love—a woman at that time already married. Ah, if you knew how I fought against that marriage, and struggled for freedom in vain! My parents were poor, though the world thought them rich, and in order to keep themselves in the ease and comfort to which they were accustomed, they would, and did, sacrifice their daughter, body and soul! Then when love came to me in the after years, I forgot the bondage that man had bound me with, feeling only the thrall that some irresistible power clasped round me, till the cords tightened and pain entered into my body, yet pain that I would not have bartered for the sweetest pleasure that had hitherto been mine!"

The whispered words faltered, and the eyes for a time closed, as if the effort to converse had brought to her supreme weariness; while the fair girl, down whose cheeks ran the hot silent rain of tears, laid a soft soothing hand, forgiving and gentle as that of mercy, "on the snows of that matchless forehead." There was silence for a time, broken only by a catching of the breath and the choking sobs of the two girls, who were overcome with grief.

Bingham sat, his face buried in his hands, totally unmanned, as he heard in silence that story.

The voice spoke again. "Con!" and there was a long sigh of weariness after, "Con, does my confes-

sion grieve you? It will soon be over, dear! Bear with me yet awhile!

"I asked him to come to me the day after that dance, pleading illness. He had come to talk to me before in a social way. He came, and while I conversed with him, seemingly unconcerned, all my passionate longing burst forth as a torrent that breaks over its bounds, and I said—God knows what! And he, bewildered, rose up, and in his cold, courteous way, said something to me by way of rebuke, which I, maddened by love and jealousy, interpreted in my own way, and in the sudden fit of fearful anger which possessed me, railed at him in language which only a mad woman could make use of, ere in a fit of frenzy I fell to the floor. My husband, alarmed, entering, chose to interpret the scene in his own way, and when I, after a period of illness, and nights racked by delirium, returned to my usual health, I found it was too late to alter our world's opinion of the matter, and still feeling the sharp sting of that sudden repulsion, resolved to leave things as they were. I heard poor Dunsmere had gone to Australia. How I longed in my heart to follow him, if only to see him once more. The bondage was growing too galling for me. At length, after some months, I told my husband all. And he, when at last he believed my story, grew pale with horror; spoke of the disgrace my conduct had brought upon an unsullied name, and the share he had himself taken in bringing it about; called upon God to pardon me, saying that he could not. I might still bear his name: he would be merciful; the establishment was mine to make use of, but from henceforth I would be as an utter stranger to him! Then I made preparation to carry into effect the desire that had always been present with me, and immediately packing my boxes, sent my own things on to London by rail. There was no one to interfere with me. My husband had not returned

home for some days. Then afterwards, when going to the meet of the hounds with poor Con, I told him that myself and husband had quarrelled, and that to-morrow I should say good-bye to all, and sail for Australia. He begged of me to allow him to come with me. He might be of some assistance, he said, during the voyage. At any rate, he would not stay in England any longer. I felt that it would be more pleasant to have someone near me in whom I could rely when far from friends, and at last consented, so instead of going with the hounds, we rode to the nearest railway station. I had decided not to return that morning, thinking I might thus get away unperceived. But no, we were recognised, and the story got abroad, it seems, that we had eloped. Poor Cashmere! I heard of his death next day, and the conversation at the breakfast table of the hotel was of it. And being unaware of my identity, all seemed united in setting down my flight with poor Con as the cause. I felt miserable. It was too late to go back. The mischief was irremediably done. So when Con returned from Ireland, and I told him of how the affair was viewed, he proposed that we should be married, and in far Australia begin a new life, where we might still be honoured and respected. I, suffering all the bitterness of repentance for the sorrows which my folly had caused, consented.

"Ah, me! How I have since longed to repair all the damage that I had done; to see the father once more lay his hand upon the head of the son he had loved so well, till the dark shadow of a scorned woman's anger fell upon him, and with mutual forgiveness, be once more reconciled. But ah; it is late! late! And I am fain to rest ere the pilgrimage is over! Kiss me, dear girl, and say that you forgive me! Perhaps I may ask for pardon from God, when I have received yours!"

Bending low till the gold of silken tresses co-

mingled, the true womanly nature of the suffering girl asserted itself, while within her the fountains of mercy were moved at that wistful, pitiful appeal for forgiveness, and, giving the fair penitent a long, lingering kiss, they wept in each other's arms.

After all the worry and turmoil, the hurrying of eager feet, the clamour of tongues, and the ceaseless straining of the eyes through the pitiless glare of the sun, how pleasantly come the gentle breezes, and the cool shades of eventide, heralding kind Night with her generous guerdon of sleep for the weary. How pleasant it is then to draw the draperies of the couch around one, and feel the senses lulled under the gentle influence of slumber. So to the soul wearied with the pains, regrets, sins, sorrows, and restless longings of a fevered life, comes with its eventide the calm, cool breath of zephyrs, fanned by the slow-moving hushed wings of Azael, heralding *that* night, the soul's balm. Even as sleep is nepenthe to the body, so came Thanatos in peaceful quiet that none heard the sound of his coming, and ere the morning light the soul of the afflicted one had passed away.

After the sad affair was over, poor disconsolate Con Bingham, placing The Wilderness once more in the market, returned in sorrow to his native land, a wreck of the former wild, easy-going Irishman.

What a change had come over the household at The Gums during those days and nights of "perilous amaze!" To Miss Vernon and Miss Dunsmere, ever loyal to the absent one, the full knowledge of his innocence had brought certainly a comfort, but this assurance had never been wanting in their minds; therefore they had gone into no open transports of joy—a quiet embrace, and "the sacrament of tears" had been their's on the first allusion to the matter. They were linked together in the bonds of no common friendship, for it was compounded of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and of the greatest of these three

they had each a full share. But as for Mr. Dunsmere, his unspoken sorrow was pitiful to see. When the others were at rest at night he paced his room sleepless, his mind dwelling always upon his hasty condemnation of an only son, whose many filial attributes and manly qualities were ever recurring to him, whilst his face, open, pleasant, and fearless of expression, haunted his thoughts, as if with gentle reproach for a father's stern, unkind, unmerited judgment.

Vernon, now more than ever resolved to carry out his intention of finding his old friend, for he was longing to convey to him the intelligence that must altogether change the future of exile that Dunsmere had allotted to himself, and to bring about as soon as possible a meeting and a reconciliation with the aged father, who felt the full bitterness of grief for the words which had led to an estrangement between them, was eager to carry on his search. Besides, his sister, Miss Vernon, was now so far recovered as to prove that all danger of the insidious malady—consumption—was over; still to make the matter certain, he arranged that she should accompany him to Northern Queensland, where she would be gladly welcomed by their friends the Mostyns, while he himself would have liberty to prosecute his quest for tidings of Reg Dunsmere. Therefore, in a few days, Vernon told Mr. Dunsmere of his intention to set out; and it was only by dint of using as an argument the doctor's advice on his sister's behalf, that the old gentleman would hear of their departure.

"I feel, Vernon," he said, "as if your dear sister were already my daughter, so gentle and winning is she, and so dear to Nelly and my unworthy self; while you, from your genial, kindly and thoughtful demeanour in this house, and above all for your unswerving loyalty all through to my absent son (whom may God watch over and grant to us one more meet-

ing ere the silver cord is loosed) as one of the family. My brother's letter to me, in speaking of you, is so cordial that I feel you are one of his favoured ones, and that alone was sufficient recommendation for me when I met you at first. As for your quest, my warmest sympathies will go with you. Should you meet him, urge the lad to forget my words, and come home to us, for I am eager for his forgiveness ere the sun goes down, for the shadows of age are lengthening before me, and it will soon be night.

"Where it is best to seek him I know not, but if there be any military organisation out there, his early education may lead him to join. Fond of horses he always was. I never see a mounted trooper without hoping it may be my son. I have asked Inspector Champley if any man of our name appears on his list of mounted police, but there, there is no trace so far."

It was with mutual regret that the two men parted when the time came, and the girls had more than one long hopeful chat about the journey to the far land, for each in her heart thought that somewhere beyond the horizon, in that northerly direction, dwelt her ideal of manhood, and, with mutual pictures drawn of those they loved best, and messages for the absent ones from Nelly Dunsmere, should her friend meet either of them in the land whither she was going, they parted sorrowfully from each other.

## CHAPTER XXV

### FOR THE GLOVES

WHILE these events were occurring in Western Victoria, away out in the Lake District of Queensland great preparations were being made for the successful carrying out of the Picnic Races.

At almost every station within one hundred miles of the township of Wirrildi, the trysting place, might be seen at the calm hour of sunset, or the equally calm, cool period of early dawn, a small select batch of horses stripped to undergo a trial, or perhaps a long steady gallop, in preparation for the coming meeting. Men who had never raced a horse in their lives, and objected strongly to the gambling element introduced into the sport when the prizes were for "filthy lucre," so much so that they would not attend a public race meeting, now, when the racing was "for the gloves," entered heartily into the spirit of the thing, and gave over to the trial their favourite thoroughbred hacks, or the best that their studs could produce.

Around the level edge of some small lake, out on the open plain near a homestead, or through the vistas amid green trees, racecourses were flagged out, and galloping hoofstrokes might be heard regularly thereon "twixt shadow and shine," for were there not many horses of high lineage on each station, having



quality to recommend them, that were hitherto untried? And were there not many others of sterling worth, proved in tussles "by flood and field" to possess courage, speed, and stamina, by which their possessors swore? It would not be until after some fair, straight trial over a distance of ground that they would yield the palm to any more youthful competitor, though he were of strains filtered "through Crucifix, Beeswing, Rebecca"—aristocratic dames of the stud-book, of which our mourned-for poet wrote.

At Heywood Downs a splendid natural racecourse was formed round a lake, quite near the homestead, and there they had a heavy string of horses at work, O'Malley taking the jumpers in hand, for an Amateur Steeplechase was one of the events to be contested. Out at Bael Bael, the overseer, Long Jack, was going to no end of trouble with his favourites, Cottesmore and Sandboy; the black boy, under his tuition, rapidly developing good hands and judgment, as he piloted the black against the flying Cottesmore. They would take a deal of beating, the pair, for the double—Ladies' Bracelet and Steeplechase—when the day came round.

At Lake Melville, Jimmy Don had two very nice horses in steady work, both of Panic blood—the big, rawboned jumper, Woodsman, and the lengthy grey mare, Mousseline. At dusk also might be seen the silver-haired manager, with his sleeves rolled up and shoulders square, sitting close to the light saddle, as he steered the powerful, strong-striding Maelstrom at exercise, or gave him a succession of leaps over the schooling fences.

Don liked to see the super in the saddle, and often said to himself, as he noticed Vincent's firm seat and splendid hands: "Gad, they may say what they like about these English fellows, but Vincent has the finest seat on a horse ever I saw in my life, bar one,

and I can't see for the life of me where even he could beat the super."

"By Jove! Don! this hawse is a beauty! Seldom wode anything bettah ovah timbah."

"Yes, sir, he *is* a clinker, and no mistake!" said Don, admiring the contour of the muscular grey. "He's like a lamb with you, sir."

"Gentle as a lady, Don, yet bold as a Nemean lion. We must make evwy effawt to bring home with us the valuable tea and coffee service allotted faw the cwooss-countwy event, Don."

"They are sure to have something good over at The Downs, sir. O'Malley is a great horseman and a splendid judge of a cross-country animal. I hear great accounts of a chestnut they call Helen-the-Fair. Young Mr. Mostyn, the clergyman, has been riding her. She stops at nothing in O'Malley's hands, they say. But that quiet customer, Long Jack, out at Bael Bael, has got a wonderfully good horse in Cottesmore, far better than most people think, for he was only a green colt when he won the Stockman's Hurdle Race so easily; and besides, sir, he'll have a splendid pilot on his back. Why, he waited on O'Malley and myself while we were fighting it out lengths ahead, and just squeezed in front four lengths from home sitting still. The next time he's up against me I'll watch him more closely, never fear."

"He has splendid seat on hawseback, Don. In fact, is just the build faw the saddle. Howevah, I think owah team must take a deal of beating, eh?"

"Yes, sir, I'm not inclined to give The Downs best till the numbers are up."

So on ran the days, and at night around the chimney corners at the various homesteads the conversation was sure to turn, sooner or later, on the approaching races. All the horses in the immediate neighbourhood were criticised, and their chances of success discussed. When the Lake Melville team

were spoken of, many a story redounding to his credit was circulated about the white-haired manager, who was such a swell and no end of a guy in his baggy breeches and gaiters, at first sight, yet who had already made a name for himself in the stockyard and on the cattle camp, and now might be seen exercising his nominations with all the skill of a Mr. St. James.

Great regret was expressed throughout the district that Mr. Fred Melville would not be present. How he would have enjoyed the realisation of his oft expressed wish, the formation of a Picnic Race Club! They had heard of his trial, and sentence on the evidence of a scoundrel, and when afterwards his escape became known there was great shaking of hands. "It was so like old Fred, giving his pursuers a lead across country. By Jove! they'd have gone all the way to have seen him sailing across the paddocks on that crack of his—Dangerous. Anyhow, he was free, and they felt sure he'd give the Irishmen a sample of Australian horsemanship if he was where report stated—safe on the green turf of the Emerald Isle."

There were other good sportsmen in the neighbourhood—the Wyndhams, Jack and Willy, who were sure to have some good ones entered. Their fame as breeders had reached across the sea. And the Warrens, Pat and Mike—as descendants of a famous Irish hunting family, were bound to be hard to beat in the steeplechase, with Rosstrevor and old Galway carrying their colours.

Nor was the coming Ball forgotten. Much speculation was indulged in as to the ladies who were likely to be present. Everyone knew that the Mostyns were enlarging their homestead at The Downs in preparation for the coming of their sisters—the Misses Mostyn—concerning whom much was favourably spoken in anticipation. It was also known that a young English lady of noted beauty was coming

out from home with them. They were to be accompanied by their aunt, the wealthy Mrs. Sherbrook, from Melbourne. Besides there were the Wyndham girls, from Silver Hill, who were both accomplished and beautiful. The Warrens, from Wicklow; the Chisholms, from Oronsay; Strachans, from Minalla, and many others from the country round about, besides the *élite* and beauty of the town itself, who were select, if few.

At length as the hour approached, "the *postridie ejus diei*" of our school-days when Cæsar was familiar, the stables in the township were crowded with hacks and carriage horses, while each loose box had its racing occupant. In the timber, on the outskirts, were erected temporary stables with grass roofs and bark walls, where rugged horses were regularly attended to by the black boys; and here and there were large canvas tents where dwelt together in merry conviviality jolly bachelors, from out back, who cheerfully gave up their hotel quarters for the accommodation of the ladies, whilst they themselves enjoyed the camping out they were so accustomed to in the bush. A posse of good cooks kept the fires burning, and attended to the making of the tea, and the baking of the damper which is so sweet to the taste of the camper out. Ay! given pleasant company my friends, and we do not sigh for ortolan or stewed truffles, in days when the warm red blood runs riot. What yarns were told round the camp fire! What wild pranks were played, and practical jokes planned that made mirth for the player, and were rather enjoyed by the played upon, who usually had the last laugh. For were we not out for a holiday, and why not enjoy it to the full?

Shall we ever forget the great General Meeting of the Club the night before the races, when each member was entitled to his say, and said it? What strange propositions were introduced with great

solemnity, to be in the same manner immediately vetoed, and others as foolish substituted, in such a merry spirit that none could take offence. Then all arrangements having been made, new members formally elected, etc., there was a rush for the "Calcutta Sweeps," and the fun was fast and furious. When the bidding commenced on the steeplechase and Galway was up, and twenty pounds sterling in the pool, how the voices chimed in, till the old horse fell to his owner's bid at almost even money. Wyndham's Red Rover, Rosstrevor, and Maelstrom, with his bush reputation, caused some spirited bidding; whilst Woodsman, Cottesmore, and others went to their owners at little over the upset price. Yes! that night the talk was of the horse, and will ever be so where there is such a gathering on the eve of the tryst.

Wirrildi had had a racecourse for several years, but as the races savoured of the public house business, little notice was taken of them save by those who "go for the plunder." Never before was there such a gathering in the township, and all the neighbouring stations were crowded to excess with visitors from a distance for the Picnic Races.

On the morrow, vehicles of all descriptions began to arrive before the hour on which the first race was to commence. On the inside of the course, opposite the saddling paddock, a space was allotted to them under the trees near the winning post, so that the ladies might have an uninterrupted view of the racing. In the saddling paddock were the jockey's tent and the steward's room, both under canvas; and on that side, after the manner of men when horses are in evidence and racing is the order of the day, congregated the sterner sex, to disperse to the opposite side when the horses were arranged at the starting post.

One can observe among the carriages the faces of many friends; yet though we know almost all the people of the district, which is a very extensive one

still there are many strange faces visible amongst the throng. Placed a little back from the nearest vehicle to the post is the Fitzroy's carriage. They live near at hand and are connections of the Mostyns; with them are the Misses Mostyn, Miss Vernon, and Mrs. Sherbrooke, and already there is a goodly throng around the carriage to welcome the new arrivals. George and Norman Mostyn are introducing their sisters and Miss Vernon all around; and afterwards, while the candidates for the Corkscrew Stakes (a grass-fed race) are preparing for the tussle, they set the sweeps going, and there is mirth and laughter, as the ladies all round enter into the spirit of the gathering.

The saddling paddock is thronged with horses, now being mounted and paraded under the colours which are set forth in the pretentious Book of the Races. They are ridden by stalwart amateurs—men who are at home in the saddle, some having already had experience of race riding, and others, though up to every trick of the horse, still new to the tussle with colours up.

Presently there is a line formed of strong horses, and a vision of fluttering silken jackets ranged in a row facing a quiet man with the red flag. Down goes the signal, and they are off pell-mell and helter-skelter, for it is only a short race. Now a brown leads, then a chestnut and then a bay, whilst the field assumes all positions ere entering the straight, when the cry is "Marigold! Marigold!" as a white-faced chestnut shoots to the front under the whip; then a brown head appears at his girths, and draws speedily nearer and nearer to his muzzle, and just as the post is almost reached, crack! crack! sounds another whip, and Invader gets home by a head. Jimmy Don getting a ringing cheer as he rides Wyndham's horse back to the scales.

Once more the colours are off, and the strappers are

busy in the saddling paddock, while here and there can be seen a little knot of people listening to a tale of the running, told by one of the riders who is still excited over its narration. Sweeps are being paid over and there is much merriment in the carriages. Hither and thither are seen hurrying, helpful brothers, cousins, and others with less strong ties of kindred, bearing hampers, or carrying buckets and cans filled with water ; for the luncheon hour is arrived, and presently up sail columns of smoke. Soon the water is boiling and tea is passed round in snowy cups to the fayre ladyes, who are, some, deftly cutting cakes or arranging plates of sandwiches for the sterner sex ; some of these latter are still in their heavy overcoats and decline sorrowfully the delicacies that are winningly offered to them, whilst wishing in their hearts that the next race was over, for even the lightest weight of pigskin avails not in their cases to bring them down to the weight allotted by the handicappers. Soon all is mirth and revelry, glasses clink and voices mingle in jest and laughter. It is the picnic hour. Presently all the good things have been done justice to, and now thoughts are turned upon the next race.

Ladies are again handed up to the high carriage seats, and non-combatants (blissful fellows) point out to them the line of fences marked by fluttering flags, between which the steeplechase is to be run. Here at the stand are two stiff posts and rails, further on a log fence, then the line leads into the paddocks, circling round past the crowd again for another turn.

Soon the bell rings for the steeplechase, and the card in my hand reads :—

						st.	lb.
1	Mr. M. Warren's	b g	Galway a ;	Green jacket, gold			
	band and cap	...	...	...	...	12	0
2	Mr. P. Warren's	gr g	Rosstrevor a ;	Crimson			
	jacket, black cap...	...	...	...	...	11	10

3	Mr. J. Wyndham's b g Red Rover a ; Black and gold hoops	st. lb.	
	... ..	11	7
4	Mr. J. Fitzroy's blk g Satan a ; Black jacket, white sleeves, red cap	... ..	11 4
5	Mr. G. Mostyn's b g Tip-us-the-wink a ; bronze and pink	... ..	10 10
6	Mr. J. Don's b g Woodsman a ; Black and white stripes	... ..	10 10
7	Mr. Harold Vincent's gr g Maelstrom, 6 yrs. ; Dark blue jacket, gold cap	... ..	10 10
8	Mr. J. Rex's b g Cottesmore, 5 yrs. ; Black jacket and cap	... ..	10 10
9	Mr. Norman Mostyn's ch m Helen-the-Fair, 5 yrs ; Pearl grey and cerise	... ..	10 7

Pat and Mick Warren are the first out. They are a pair of goers. The onlookers are sure of a good race, if only the two start. There is no shirking with either man or horse. They would go any distance for a spin over "the leps," and ride against each other to the bitter end, though they are the most brotherly fellows going. It is related of them that Pat having come to grief in a race when leading, and lying in front of the leap in such a position, with his horse pinning him down, that Galway, with Mick up, and another horse, would not face it. Mick and the stranger got off, tied their horses up and went to Pat's assistance, quickly getting the grey on his legs again. As soon as they did so Mick hastened back to his horse, calling to his brother : "Hould now, Pat !" "Whin I'm pasht the post" was the reply, as Pat speedily remounting obtained such a lead that they never got near him. "Whin I'm pasht the post" became a by-word in answer to an unreasonable request.

Then after them came the steady-going, game-looking Woodsman, with his natty pilot in the saddle, then followed the slashing black, Satan, his owner in the saddle. A rare one to look at was the black, but it took a heavy double bridle to restrain him. Little Helen-the-Fair swung along under Norman Mostyn



with perfect action, her blood-like ears flung forward as if searching for the fence she expected to see in front. Her rider, she knew, never rose in the stirrups unless they were going for a flutter, and *her* spins were nearly always over fences. Jack Vernon, looking on from the carriage, was astonished at the quality of the nags and the workman-like style of their riders. He would have been glad to accept a mount, but that his sister wished him not to do so. There was a murmur of approbation and a little clapping of hands as the slashing grey Maelstrom strode over the track, his bold grey head held enquiringly in the air, while his long white tail streamed behind him.

"Looks like a rider, at any rate," was the comment passed on his grey-bearded pilot, who sat upright and square in the saddle, holding rein and whip in his gloved hands low down on the wither, and looking as cool and complacent as if he was a very Fordham in the pigskin.

"Steady, my lad," said he soothingly to the big grey, which had leaped suddenly to one side, alarmed at the lowering of a parasol on the rails.

Jimmy Don pulled up to look at them; he had never seen a more cross-country-like pair, and he was not the only person there who, with previous experience of racing between the flags, looked with pleasure on the grey and his rider. Red Rover, with his clever rider, Jack Wyndham, in the saddle, next took the people's gaze as he trotted cleanly down the straight, turning round at the entrance, and doing a steady preliminary in the wake of the powerful grey.

Out of the timber a quarter of a mile away came on to the track a bright bay horse, fidgetting along, ridden by a tall, slim horseman, who was unknown to most of those present.

"That's Rex from Bael Bael, on Cottesmore," said Don; and as he spoke like a flash came up, right in the centre of the course between the two lines of

spectators, the white-legged bay, flinging the brown loam from his hoofs as from a catapult. Still as a rock sat the slim, fair-bearded rider, his brown muscular hands giving to the play of his horse's long blood-like neck.

In his turn Vincent pulled up, saying to Don, "By Jove, Don! Clippah's man and hawse, aw I'm mistaken!"

Cottesmore had shot past quickly, giving most of the onlookers little time to fully note the beauty of his contour, but Jack Vernon had seen and watched with admiring eyes his quick, clear style of going, and the motionless ease of his rider, and immediately invested a fiver in the Totalisator, worked by the club, on the bay.

Some distance away they were drawn into line, all the horses on the card. There were one or two false starts, for the starter was a conscientious man, and even in a three miles' race would allow of no advantage being received by one of the competitors. At length, with all eyes upon them, they sprang off together. Before reaching the first fence Satan had obtained a good lead, defying his rider's attempt to steady him, and led Galway, Rosstrevor, and Woodsman over the double in fine style. Don knew that his horse could not win on the flat, therefore he did not choose that the race should be slow between the jumps, and Mick and Pat Warren, from sheer love of the game, bore him company in the wake of the flying black, Cottesmore lying last of the field. Thus they went in and out of the paddocks, where Tip-us-the-wink came to grief. Now past the stand again they came, and the onlookers cheered right merrily as the field took close order, Satan bolting off at the entrance to the straight. Galway, Rosstrevor, and Woodsman still kept together, jumping magnificently, Maelstrom next, going easily, and fencing apparently without exertion, his rider's face coming in for a

spattering of clods as they raced down the dip. Cottesmore, his mouth wide open and head stretched straight out, held as if in a vice by his rider, rose at each fence, side by side with the little chestnut, Helen-the-Fair, and altogether it was a pretty race the onlookers thought. Thus they went away through the far timber, and now the mare began to creep up.

"Helen wins! Helen wins!" cry out the mare's admirers, and sure enough the little beauty went up to the leaders, and at the second last fence was half a length in front.

Again all over, and whips were at work on Ross-trevor and Woodsman, while Galway hung to the quarters of the mare. Coming to the last fence, Maelstrom, closely followed by Cottesmore, shot past the beaten horses and chased the mare, who led over, Cottesmore alighting in the big grey's tracks.

Rising slightly in the saddle, Mr. Vincent urged his horse with his hands, and stride by stride closed on the little mare. The shouting was immense. "Helen wins! Come on, Norman! Maelstrom! Maelstrom!"

Catching sight of the grey head at his girth, Mostyn brought down the whalebone a quick one, two, three, and rode for his life, and seemed about to win, when the whalebone gave the grey a reminder, and the two again were locked together. Suddenly, like the first streak of light shot through the timber across the plain, flashing past the drove of flying kangaroo, another horse came from the rear, and amid one roar of "Cottesmore!" the bay flashed past the post winner by half a length.

There is nothing like a close finish to bring out the latent enthusiasm in a sporting man's heart. The men had got down from their posts of vantage, having cheered themselves hoarse, and rushed towards the scales to give the riders an ovation, while

the ladies clapped their gloved hands as the winner returned.

Long Jack, sitting loosely on the back of the bay, evidently enjoying a rest after his exertions, came up alongside the red-coated clerk of the course, looking calm and collected, his whip hand resting on his knee. Vernon looked up in his face, as he halted a second ere the judge said "dismount," and his heart almost stood still.

"All right," said the clerk.

Then arose another ringing cheer, and the horse was led away by the black boy, while his rider strode into the dressing-tent to perform his toilet. Vernon followed with two or three others, friends of the jockeys.

Arrived in the room, Jack unbuttoned his jacket, under which was a light silk undervest, and for a second his shoulder was bare, displaying there three long white scars. The next instant he felt a hand smite his shoulder, and another grasp his arm and turn him round, while a loud, glad shout of "Reg" rang in his ear. For a second Rex seemed dumb with astonishment, while his hand gripped that extended to him. "Vernon, by God!" And his face grew pale as if he would faint.

"It's all right, Reg, old man. Clear as the sun! Came all the way out to find you!"

The other amateurs looked on in astonishment. They were bewildered.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said Vernon. "This is my old friend, Jack Rex Dunsmere, one of the best gentleman riders in his regiment, and a true 'Britisher' anywhere!"

Mr. Vincent's mouth opened in astonishment as he gazed for a second at Dunsmere, and then at Vernon, as if he could not believe his ears. "What!" he said. "Not a welative of Colonel Dunsdaw—fifty-fifth—my old fwient!"

"The same, sir," said Vernon.

"Then I rejoice to take him by the hand!" and Dunsmere felt his fingers compressed by a strong right hand, and knew by the keen glance through the gold-rimmed spectacles that he had another friend in far Australia.

George and Norman Mostyn were on their feet in an instant. "Have you found him then, Vernon? Good old Jack! Knew he was the Right Bower of something!" said Norman, "but did not know it was trumps!"

"Don't know about England," said George. "He's a man anywhere—horseback or foot—straight as a line!"

"No need to introduce him to us, Vernon. We've roughed it together too often—eh, Jack, old man?" and they gave him a handshake all round.

Pat and Mick Warren, and Jimmy Don, enthusiastic horsemen, who could take a fair beating from a good man, just then came in together, and shook hands warmly with the victor. When they heard who he was, they started three ringing cheers.

"Dress yourself as quickly as you can, Reg. Will tell you all by and bye. Your friends here—the Mostyns—know all about it."

"Ay, Jack, we do. Heard the whole story and promised to assist Vernon in his search for *you*! never dreaming that in our Long Jack, the crack bushman, we had the man required. Thought he'd be some English swell with a high collar and bags! Did we not, Norman?"

"Ay, that we did!" said Norman; and all four laughed merrily together.

"You might have passed me in the crowd to-day," said Vernon, "and your long beard would have concealed your identity; but in the saddle that particular style you have of leaning far back over the jumps, so noticeable at a distance, made me watch

you at every leap, and at the finish I found myself yelling, 'Come along, Jack!' with the others, as if my senses discovered a friend that the outward vision could not recognise. Gad! My heart stood still when I looked into your face as you pulled up at the scales. How I watched for the baring of the shoulder, and when the three white scars appeared, my doubts were over. Same brand, you see, gentlemen," continued Vernon, baring his arm, and showing three similar scars. "Jungle tiger wounded. Man underneath—myself. Man on top—Dunsmere. Dead tiger—two men down! Never mind, Reg, old man; came out on top all right that time, and here we are on top again, thank God! Have a look at this"—and Dunsmere received his father's letter, and turned aside to read it.

What words were written there he has not said, but certain it is that there was not a look of defiance in the sad eyes that perused the lines, nor sound thereof in the deep sigh that would have been a sob in a less resolute man.

While Dunsmere gazed at the handwriting that was so familiar to him from boyhood, and read again and again the contents of the letter, absorbed in many thoughts, for the long-passed avenues of early years were opened up again, and he was once more treading the green fields of childhood amongst the daisies and the flowers of the field, with loving prattling sisters by his side, or as a youth listening to the honourable admonitions of his revered father ere the evil days came when the past was buried—Vernon had hastened away to the carriage where was his sister.

Leaning forward as she noticed his approach, her eyes scanned his face as if she could read there the intelligence that she longed to hear from his lips, for, for one second, as the winner's horse was led into the enclosure, her eyes had rested on the profile of his

rider's sun-browned face, and her "heart with one leap stood still." And in its glad light she knew her womanly instinct was true. She could only say, "Oh, Jack! is it Reg?"

"Do not distress yourself, dear; see for yourself! Here he comes!"

Dunsmere, the letter still in his hand, mechanically followed Vernon, discerning his tall form beside the carriage. Raising his hat, as the presence of the ladies recalled him to himself, he was about to pass on, when Vernon said, "Reg, here is some one who wishes to see you."

Thinking that perhaps some fair lady, who had held Cottesmore in a sweep, and was therefore a winner, wished to congratulate him, Dunsmere again raised his hat, and his eyes to the lady's face. For one second these two, who had been so long separated, looked into each other's eyes, and then in the glad "Reg! dear Reg!" and the deep toned "Lily," the conventionalities were forgotten, and for a second the world was lost by these two twin souls.

What a glad afternoon that was for them! and how merry were they all in that carriage, for the Misses Mostyn shared in their brother's joy at the knowledge that Vernon's bosom friend had turned up in the person of the man for whom all had such a liking for his manliness, and unassuming worth.

Dunsmere would not ride again that afternoon. Cottesmore and Sandboy were forgotten in the realisation of his dreams, of his hopes, of his longings, to hear *her* voice again. Vernon, therefore, donned the colours, running a good second on "Sandboy" to that accomplished horseman, Mr. Vincent, on "Sweetlips," in the Lady's Bracelet. When it became generally known by the men that Rex from Bael Bael, who had just won the steeplechase after such a most exciting finish, was the absentee whom Vernon had come out from England to seek—when the tiger

story was noised about, and the ladies had learnt the story of the old engagement, and the meeting between the lovers, each weaving her own thread of romance through the tale—there was a great desire for an introduction to the hero of the hour at the ball that evening, so much so, that after Dunsmere had had one dance with his beloved, and told her of his embarrassment, he slipped quietly away from the throng to where his lately found friend, the Rev. James Mostyn, was sitting deep in the study of Edwin Arnold's "The Light of Asia," all alone apparently, yet in reality scarcely ever less alone. With a glad greeting the book was put aside, and Mostyn welcomed the new comer as the son of his loyal friend of The Gums.

What pleasant stories Mostyn had to tell Dunsmere of his people in their new home. In the three or four hours they spent together the flood-gates of the reserved manner which was characteristic of each seemed to be thrown open, and the streams of thought flowed free.

There is an old scriptural quotation which reads, "As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend," and here was an apt illustration of its triteness.

With little loss of time old Mr. Dunsmere was written to by his exiled son, and Nelly had a loving epistle all to herself; both letters being indited while to the writer's ear came the music of the dance measures, and the rhythmical cadence of merry feet.

On the morrow a general move was made by the Heywood Downs and Lake Melville people towards home, whither we will shortly follow them.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE LAST RAID

IN a few days the township of Wirrildi had resumed its wonted calm. The hotelkeepers had once more got their rooms tidied up, and business flowed along in its usual steady manner. The tills of the landlords had been filled to over-flowing. It was not often that the far back squatters and their people came into the township, but when they did money was made to circulate at a very rapid rate, all the business people of the place coming in for a share of the spoil. Storekeepers, publicans, butchers, bakers, saddlers, blacksmiths, and even the general riff-raff, who held or led a horse, washed buggies and harness, and contrived to make themselves useful in many other ways, to all these came the harvest with the picnic races, and they duly reaped, threshed, and gathered it into their storehouses.

There was great counting of money into the coffers of the Bank as a consequence, and behind the counter business was brisk.

Captain Ayre, during the heat of the excitement, kept the streets in order with the aid of his well-drilled men, and very promptly quelled any rioting that arose. Albeit he had to wink his eye at the escapades of those who could afford it, and did pay for, the damage they had done, not of malice aforethought, but from sheer buoyancy of spirits. He had

received this morning an urgent message from Borra Berri Station to say that two valuable horses had been stolen therefrom, taken out of the stables the previous night, and immediately had saddled up, and with his black trackers started off in pursuit, leaving the station in charge of the stalwart Hibernian Fogarty, who was quite capable of keeping the peace in the township now that the hurry and bustle were over. He was a terror to the loafers round about from his prompt method of running them in when necessity compelled that course, and therefore they were likely to lie quiet while the burly constable was on duty.

There were still in the township a few men of the working class who had come in from the back stations, having cheques to spend, and who had not yet quite got to the end of their tethers, as represented by the size of their respective cheques, so that strange faces were not likely to be taken notice of.

After the departure of the posse of police, three of these, evidently still suffering from the effects of drink, having ascertained that the uniform of the constable in charge had disappeared within the barrack gates, reeled along singing up the main, for it was the only, street.

"Hallo," says one, "Bank here! Go in cash my cheque," and he staggered in to the Bank by a side door, rolling up against the counter.

"Cash cheque please!" and he placed a dirty strip of paper on the counter. While the manager (the accountant being absent) endeavoured to decipher the signature to the cheque the man presented a revolver at his head, and said quietly, "Throw up your hands!" His mates, who had come in at the front door while the manager had his attention drawn to the cheque, immediately seized the latter and had him bound and gagged before he could offer resistance. They then closed the Bank's doors and

put up the usual holiday notice, "Will open tomorrow at 10 o'clock," procured the keys of the safe, and took therefrom eight hundred pounds sterling in notes and gold, some of the harvest of golden grain just stored by the people of Wirrildi. Afterwards, leaving one of their number to guard the bank manager, two of them going out by the usual way, once more reached the street and took their way towards the barracks, arm in arm, one man evidently far gone in liquor, and the other none too steady.

"What have yiz there?" inquired Fogarty on their arrival.

"A drunken baste, sarjint, he stole me cheque and has it wid him this minnit!"

"Ye're drunk yersilf!" says Fogarty. "Come wid me and we'll attend to the matther."

"Put him there," said he, turning the lock of the strong cell, and opening the door, standing on the threshold himself. Before he could say more he was thrust violently to the floor, receiving a heavy blow on the head which stunned him, and then his jacket and cap were taken off and he himself left a prisoner in his own kingdom. Then going back the robbers procured the bank manager's buggy, harnessed his horse up, and drove him to the barracks, locking him up with Fogarty, "For company's sake," as they said. After having drinks in the hotels, and shouting for the "dead beats" who were suffering a recovery from their several sprees, they purchased some clothing at the leading store and quietly took their departure without causing any special comment by their actions.

Captain Ayre came into town next morning after a fruitless errand, and riding straight up to the barracks, found no one visible, though he could hear loud cries from the direction of the lock-up.

"By Jove, men! Fogarty has been busy since we left!"

Hereupon a loud voice, accompanied by a heavy kick on the door, ejaculated, "We're locked in, shure!"

"Yes," said the Captain with a laugh, "you're locked in safe enough!"

"Mine think it, that feller Fogarty! By crikey, he bin get drunk, lock hisself up!" and the black troopers laughed merrily at the joke, while the captain went forward to see. Sure enough there was Fogarty, and the bank manager, but the keys of the lock-up were gone.

"What's up, Fogarty?"

"The Bynk's bin stuck up, shure, and mesilf made prishner unbenownst, and Mr. Timple wid me. Unlock the dure, sor, and we'll raypoort the matther fully, sor."

"My compliments to Mr. Temple, Fogarty, but the keys are gone! We will have to draw the bolts!"

After some delay this was done and the prisoners released. Then Captain Ayre learnt all particulars of the men who had robbed the Bank, and immediately identified them as the men who had visited the district of late with their daring exploits.

Fresh horses were immediately procured, and the work of tracking the bushrangers recommenced; but unfortunately the police did not know exactly when they were on the right trail, there were so many horsemen passing along the roads. The fact was that the men they wanted had, while visiting the town, left their horses in charge of a comrade in the scrub a mile away, having seen Captain Ayre hurrying out with his troopers towards Borra Berri, consequently the trackers were misled and pulled up the wrong men at a station ten miles away. Then making a cast across country, in order to make up for lost time, they struck a fresh trail and again rode rapidly in pursuit, this time with the full assurance that they were on the right track. They had followed that round hoof-

print more than once of late, and once they had caught sight of horse and rider, but with the speed and elasticity of the African koodoo, the big roan horse had carried his pilot straight away from them, clearing fences in his stride that delayed the pursuers till the pursued was far out of sight.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### FACE TO FACE

BY easy stages the Heywood Downs people were making their way homeward, every mile and hour of the journey being pleasant, for they had all become knitted together by bonds of close friendship, and their communion was therefore doubly enjoyable. This morning they had just said "good-bye" to Mr. Vincent and Don at the Lake Melville homestead, and the latter had promised to rejoin them in a few days, when they had arranged affairs on the station. They had not gone five minutes when Mr. Vincent and Don, watching the departure of Dan O'Malley and the black boy with their charges—Helen-the-Fair, Cottesmore, Sandboy, and Tip-us-the-wink—heard the clatter of horses' hoofs, and turning saw a strange policeman with a man habited in stockman's garb enter the open yard. Cantering up alongside, the man in the police uniform called out to Mr. Vincent, "Seen any strangers on horseback here this morning?" As he spoke O'Malley turned in his saddle suddenly, and looking into the bushy bearded face of the speaker for an instant, exclaimed with a terrible oath, "You black dog! At last!" and thrust his hand into his revolver pouch (he had always carried a pistol since that affair at Bael Bael when with his favourite horses). The moment he did so the man who had first spoken fired, and Dan returned the shot, falling from

the mare, which bolted at a furious pace with Cottesmore down the road towards home. Vincent saw through the affair like a flash, and sprang, unarmed as he was, at the bushranger, who, as the manager approached, fired point blank hurriedly at his face. To his astonishment the grey hair of Mr Vincent was blown off, and for a second they were face to face. If the Evil One had suddenly appeared before him, gazing with eyes of fire, the bushranger could not have been more astonished. "Melville!" he ejaculated, then turned his horse and fled rapidly towards a man holding a spare horse among the trees, accompanied by his mate, before Don could seize hold of his horse's bridle, so sudden and unexplained was the onslaught.

The manager, whose eyes were blinded for an instant by the grains of powder, so close was the discharge of the pistol to his face, exclaimed, "Blackmore! for a thousand!" and grasping Sand-boy's mane leaped to the saddle in pursuit. Jimmy Don, utterly speechless for the moment with astonishment, saw the fair features of Fred Melville where a second or two before stood Mr. Vincent, ere they were turned from him in the pursuit, and with a joyous "whoo whoop," sped him on the way, and then turned to O'Malley's assistance. The bushranger had a good start, and, reaching the horses mentioned, he rapidly mounted a beautiful roan, which shaking its head angrily, swung off at a sweeping gallop, the other men dispersing in opposite directions. Then commenced the chase in bitter earnest, for, on the right, looking over the flat, Melville could see that the truant horses, having reached the vehicles, had been caught by their owners who were quickly in the saddles, having heard the pistol shots, and were now speeding across the open towards pursuers and pursued.

Dunsmere was bewildered; which was the trans-

gressor? He saw a man in police uniform speeding away followed by a fairhaired civilian on *his* horse, Sandboy, and clad in Mr. Vincent's garb; but he was not long in doubt, for turning in his saddle as he heard the galloping hoofs on his right, the black-bearded face disclosed the features of the horse thief against whom "Long Jack" had still an account, and right glad was he to feel the gallant Cottesmore bounding along beneath him in fair field. Giving the view halloo of the Westerton hunt which he knew his friend would recognise, Fred Melville turned his face towards Jim Mostyn, who ranged alongside on the game little chestnut, and then called out "Blackmore! Jim! And he's riding Dangerous by all that's holy! We're out of it! It's a race between him and Cottesmore!" Sitting down on Cottesmore, Dunsmere was riding him head and heel. He would never have such an opportunity again he knew, and it was the chance he would have chosen if he had been asked to state the terms of a match between them. Yet, ride how he might, he felt he was not gaining on the slashing roan which streaked through the timber like a flash of blue pine smoke. Over the leaf-strewn sward they raced, and now the big fence of the horse paddock came in sight, three rails five feet in height, and the black-bearded face was turned backwards towards them with a shout of defiance. He knew what he had under him evidently, and defied their best endeavours.

"Look out for the wire!" yelled Fred. "Pull off! Pull off!" fearful for his good roan horse, but the warning, if heard, was unheeded. The pace was tremendous. Through the aisles of the trees an opening showed up to the rails, and now the roan, with ears cocked, raced straight at the stiff obstacle, the no less determined horse and rider in his wake going also at top speed. Standing off in his matchless beautiful



style the roan shot up in the air, tucking his forelegs under him without dwelling for an instant. Neither man nor horse saw the strong wire that was strung two feet above the top rail to prevent the inroads of kangaroo, and just when apparently sailing clear over the fence, the wire caught the roan above the knees and threw him an awful fall fair on his back, his head being turned towards the fence as he fell, flinging his rider forward some yards away. Dunsmere was too near to pull off. With a word of encouragement to the horse he held Cottesmore together and struck him with both heels. Straight up went the bay, his clean limbs quivering in the air, both hind hoofs showing at his side in the terrible effort to clear the jingling swinging wire that was bent in the centre from the concussion of the powerful roan. Jack's face brushed the leaves, ere, with a snort, Cottesmore dropped safely over, and carried his rider some lengths before he could be controlled, then throwing himself from the saddle Dunsmere advanced on the bushranger, who had risen to his feet and stood, revolver in hand, ready for him. Mostyn dropped from his saddle also, and slightly in advance of Melville, rushed unarmed towards the desperado, who hesitated at whom to fire. Shaken by the fall his bullet missed Dunsmere, and the next instant Mostyn had him, and his shooting was over, for, weakened by O'Malley's bullet, he was powerless to offer resistance and was speedily secured. Then Melville turned towards the good horse, as the roan essayed to rise, rearing up on his front feet, and with a long deep groan falling back clutching at the grass with his teeth. "Dangerous, old man!" said Fred, catching the horse's head in his arms, and the good horse gave a short neigh, his ears quivering as if at recognition of his master's voice, "Come!" and the roan put forth all his strength in another effort, but it was useless, his hind limbs refused to stir and he sank

back to earth once more, with the old terrified, startled look in his eyes, his red nostrils wide open and his body quivering.

"Brave old lad! Steady, my boy, steady!" said Fred firmly to calm his friend, as of old he was wont to do. Then the limbs stretched out to their fullest extent, there was a quivering of all the muscles of the horse, a sound from the nostrils between a neigh of answer and a groan, and next instant the winner of the Great Western Steeplechase was dead. Melville held the once game bold head in his lap, and his heart felt chill for, remembering the dear old associations, he could have wept like a child.

Mostyn stood silently beside him ; at length he said, "It's no use, Fred, we can only bury him now! Poor old fellow!" Melville stood up beside his old comrade and took his extended hand.

"Pardon me, Jim! I could not include you in my guilt, though, God knows, it was hard enough at times to keep from taking you by the shoulder and owning all."

Having secured the bushranger, Dunsmere, keeping watch over him, saw the action of the two men and was much puzzled as he had been all along at the appearance of the stranger in Vincent's attire. They came towards him, and Mostyn said, "This is Fred Melville, Dunsmere, whom you have hitherto known as Mr. Vincent." The two men clasped hands in silence, looking into each other's eyes. To Melville the announcement of Dunsmere's personality caused no sudden shock, since he had heard his name in the dressing-tent at the races ; though then he had almost betrayed himself by the pleasure he felt in grasping Dunsmere's hand, when Vernon had introduced the latter in a general way. Each man knew something of the story of the other, having the bond of alien and outcast between them, yet they felt

no shame at this inner consciousness, for there was no indelible disgrace implanted there ; rather did the pity for the sufferings of each cement the freemasonry of true friendship between them.

Much that was inexplicable to Dunsmere during the past few minutes was now becoming clear.

"I am very pleased, indeed, to meet you, Melville," he said. "You are by no means a stranger to me, accustomed as I have been to hear your name mentioned so often up here. I assure you that the events of the past few minutes almost made me doubt my sanity." And he looked towards the bushranger's horse, which lay quiet and still.

"That all must have been very perplexing to you, Dunsmere, I can easily understand. That is all that remains of my good horse Dangerous, which I left safe and well on the Victorian border a little while ago. And his rider, the man you have secured, is Blackmore, by whose lying evidence I was convicted, and to whom I owe the seeming disgrace of appearing hitherto as I was not, rather than remain a prisoner. It was he who endeavoured to lay the blame of the iniquitous attempt on Dalgleish's life on Mostyn here, in order probably to screen himself."

"You don't say so, Melville ! We may consider ourselves fortunate, then, that we have captured the man, although the capture has also effected the death of your good horse. I can understand now why Cottesmore seemed such a laggard in the chase. He was following a wonder ! And now to lie dead away out here, who gave promise of being an equine king 'between the flags' ! Poor old fellow ! As to Blackmore here, I don't think he'll get away with any more horses ; he seems badly hit." And together they turned towards their prisoner.

After leaving the Lake Melville Station, James Mostyn and Dunsmere had got into a single buggy, in order to have a smoke, and, being behind the

others, they heard the firing, and saw the horses tearing down the road towards them. Divining that something serious had occurred, they had rapidly mounted, leaving the driver in charge of the buggy, and this circumstance led to the capture of the bushranger.

Shortly after the affray at the station, Captain Ayre and his trackers galloped up.

"A bit too late again, I see," he said to Don. "You've had a scrimmage. What! O'Malley badly wounded? Where's Vincent, and the gang? Hallo, what's this?" picking up the wig and beard. "Looks uncommonly like Vincent's hair."

"Gone after the bushrangers in that direction five minutes ago," said Don, "joined by Mr. Mostyn and Long Jack."

"Mount, boys, quick! Lead off, Velvet! We're right this time." And away they went after the little tracker, spurring their jaded horses in their haste.

Thus they raced to the boundary fence where were the group, now assisting the bushranger, who was found to be badly wounded.

"You've got him, gentlemen, eh? Very good! We were, unfortunately, too late to be of service in the encounter which you have evidently gone through," casting his eye over the dead horse and the wounded bushranger. "Pardon me," he said to Melville, "may I ask who you are?" and he looked at the gaiters by which Vincent was familiarly known.

"Fred Melville! at your service," said Melville.

"Ah! By Jove! Wanted for escaping from Her Majesty's gaol. Eh? But where's Vincent?"

"Wather, fancy he's, er, disappeared," drawled Fred.

And Ayre slapped him on the shoulder.

"Best presentment ever I saw in my life," he said. "However, must detain you, you know, for the

present. Let me tell you though, that Champley informs me that Blackmore, upon whose evidence you were committed, is wanted by the Victorian police."

"He need not be wanted much longer, captain, for you have the identical man now in your custody, there."

"Indeed!" said Ayre, "then he stuck up, and robbed the Bank in Wirrildi yesterday, and has besides no end of a record of horse-stealing against him. Certainly not a very reliable witness against a man. Lend a hand here, boys!" he said. And in a rude litter of saddle-cloths and bridle-reins, Blackmore, his mouth closed as far as speech was concerned, was conveyed back to the house by the black troopers, where he was laid on a couch and his wound examined. He had been hit under the shoulder, and was not likely to do much damage in this world again.

Jimmy Don met them as they came in, and took Melville by the hand, shaking it first with one hand, then with two, without uttering a word. There was a mild reproach in his steadfast eyes. Fred understood his thoughts, and laying his hand on the lad's shoulder said, "It was to keep your conscience clear, Jimmy, that I kept up the disguise. You had no secret to keep as it was, and I knew how much you would have dreaded discovery, for my sake, if you had known the truth."

"It's all clear now, clear as sunshine, Fred. I might have guessed. The very horses knew! Why, I remember yet how that grey, snake-headed beggar, Maelstrom, sniffed at your hand. What a dunce I was!"

Poor O'Malley had already been taken inside when they returned; he was terribly injured, and failing fast. After a little while he asked, "Did they get him?"

"Yes."

"It was Mr. Fred, wasn't it? and Mr. Jim? and Long Jack? I saw them joining in. I knew he couldn't beat them, no man alive could!"

"Yes, Dan, he is in the outer room, badly wounded by your pistol shot."

"Bring me to him; I must speak to him in Mr. Jim's presence. Quick! I'm near done!"

He was carried on a mattress to the room where Blackmore lay.

"Blackmore," he said huskily, "you have a lot to answer for; you robbed me of Mary Lee's love long ago, and where is she? You killed my sister. She was dying when I saw her, and I asked God to thrust my soul to the darkest hell if ever I showed mercy to you when we met. I saw you go into the township one evening and waited for your return, and shot the wrong man, though I did not know that till long afterwards, for the bush tells no tales, or Mr. Jim would not have suffered."

Mostyn spoke: "Cherish not hatred, Dan. My trials have been for my good. Extend forgiveness to this man, and you may ask pardon from God, before whom you must shortly appear, for your blood-guiltiness."

The dying man rose up in his couch and said, "Mr. Jim, for this wound received in fair fight, I can forgive him, life was never much count for me, but for that sweet soul lost, as men say, I ask God to thrust him into the fires of hell, and link me with him, hand-in-hand, lest by some cowardly device he again escapes just punishment." Sinking back exhausted, O'Malley breathed heavily for a while, then spoke fitfully like the flaring of a candle that is nearly burnt down.

"Don't cry, Kate, dear. It's only another fall from the Buzzard colt, I'll lie still awhile. How dark it is to-night, and the cattle so restless.

Ha, there goes Long Jack on the colt. They're safe now, boys. Good-night. I'll turn in."

Then the voice of the Rev. James Mostyn arose, speaking reverently: "The glory of man is as the grass. The grass withereth, the flower thereof fadeth away." And then after a few moments of unbroken silence, it continued, "He will have mercy upon whom He will have mercy, and whom He will, He will abundantly pardon!"

Dan O'Malley would never again see the wavy grasses bending and swaying to the breeze on the undulating Western downs, where in the dells stand the silent, umbrageous blackwood trees, beneath which he would have wished to be laid at rest. But the old she-oaks on the hill above the farm-house are still singing a dirge for her whose brother had as a boy climbed among their branches, and woven many a linked chain of their stringed leaves for his beloved sister's neck, long ere "the windows were darkened, or ever the silver cord was loosed, and the golden bowl was broken!" But, for *him*, no music strays through the sombre umbrage of the gloomy pine-trees, where is his last resting place, for no strings are there that the light fingers of zephyrs may touch, nor thither do the feathered songsters come with their vesperal harmonies. Sacred to thy dominions, oh, Thanatos! should they be, for the pines thus learn no secrets, neither tell they any, standing in their gloomy, frowning grandeur, with this legend only linked about them—"De mortuis nil nisi bonum."

And from their sad, sheltering silence o'er the dead, we too, friend, might take a lesson.

Blackmore was conscious of all that passed, but kept silence; his small glittering eyes looked out from his bearded face, like the eyes of some fierce animal. Shaven, all save the moustache, he used to be, and in his present bearded state his identity was entirely concealed. O'Malley knew his voice. It

had always haunted him, for his hatred was bitter, as from his morose nature such was sure to be ; but until Fred Melville had seen his mouth open, as it had done in his astonishment at the result of his point blank shot, he did not recognise him,—then the mutual recognition was complete.

Mattresses were placed in Mostyn's buggy, and the wounded prisoner comfortably laid therein, Fred Melville being installed as driver of the vehicle, the police riding alongside. Jim Mostyn and Reg Dunsmere, both without hesitation agreed to return to Wirrildi with Melville, and at once despatched the black boy with a letter to Norman Mostyn and Vernon, telling them of the affray with the bush-rangers, and of the leader's capture, and identity with Blackmore, and also of the transformation, at a pistol shot, of Mr. Howard Vincent into the long-lost Fred Melville, stating that Captain Ayre was, as in duty bound, taking charge of the latter pending further developments. They themselves considered it their duty to stand beside Melville for the present, in the hope that they might be of some service to him, and were therefore returning to Wirrildi.

Accordingly the route was taken, and by nightfall the little township was again reached.

Very often during the journey Fred had to attend to his charge, giving him water to drink, and ministering to his comfort. Melville could feel a bitter desire for revenge while the man who had condemned him to endure exile from his dearest friends was at large and in the pride of his strength. Could they then have met he would have gloried in returning blow for blow, but now all the anger was gone from him in the presence of this sore stricken helpless man, needing succour, and he gave it, as any true man would have done. When, therefore, the barracks were reached, Blackmore begged of him not to leave him, as he wished to say a word or two



in Captain Ayre's presence. Captain Ayre had immediately sent for the doctor and for Mr. Temple, the bank manager, who was also a magistrate. On the arrival of the latter he at once recognised Blackmore as the man who was leader in the "sticking up" of the Bank. The doctor told Blackmore, after examination, that he had not long to live, and if he wished to put his affairs straight, it would be as well to do so at once, as he was mortally wounded.

"There is nothing to put straight now worth while attending to, Doctor ; only this, and I made up my mind to do that without your advice. Melville, you're a man to treat me as you've done after the way I tried to ruin your life. Captain Ayre, I stole Jeffrey's cattle, doctored the receipt, and pocketed the plunder. I'm not crawling for forgiveness! If I got away to-morrow I'd plunder and slay. Ay, and glory in it! I was imprisoned years ago, for cattle stealing, innocently, and came out to find my old mother dead of a broken heart, or starvation, or both. There is one law for the rich and another for the poor, say what you like. Christ! if I only could live a little longer I'd deal with the dogs who hunted her to the grave!" The blood-red froth came to his lips and checked further utterance. Presently he lay quite still, and the doctor said, "You may go now, gentlemen. I will watch here and call you should there arise necessity."

The young clergyman remained to keep the vigil with the doctor, while the others adjourned to the next room, so as to be near in case their presence was required.

"Melville," said Captain Ayre, "I have heard of you from Inspector Champley, an old army friend of mine, who wrote giving me all particulars of the cattle stealing affair, of your subsequent escape, and the high esteem in which you and your family were held

in that district, adding that while it was our duty, as heads of the police, to make every effort to effect your re-capture, still he trusted that should you be apprehended in my district, every courtesy, consistent with the regulations, should be shown you, for he shared in the general opinion that Blackmore's evidence, on which you were sentenced, was unreliable, circumstances having arisen since the trial which placed him in a very unfavourable light. Once tongues started wagging, people had plenty to say about him, and there appeared to be more than a grain of truth in much that had come to light. Only last week he wired me stating that a person answering Blackmore's description, giving the name of Moore, had sold a small mob of high-class horses in the Melbourne market, some of which were now known to have been stolen from the borders of New South Wales, and probably the rest came from Queensland. The police were now searching for the offender. It is very certain that if Blackmore ever recovers from O'Malley's bullet, it will only be to hear a just sentence of extermination passed on him. Under the circumstances, Melville, there is no necessity for my detaining you longer, although you are still under the ban of the law. I will only exact your *parole d'honneur* that you will acquaint me with your intention should you purpose leaving the station, so that I may know where to find you should that course be necessary. I will advise the authorities of the issue of events, and await further instructions. As Mr. Vincent, you made a name for yourself in the district for courtesy, hospitality, and integrity, yet from what I glean of your repute before these untoward events took place, I feel very certain that none will regret losing even Mr. Vincent, in order that they may welcome *le bon camarade*, Mr. Fred Melville. I hope our next meeting will be under more pleasant circumstances, but, all the same, should we have

another brush with bushrangers I would ask no braver comrades than any one of you three."

Fred, in thanking Captain Ayre for the opinions he had expressed, said: "It had caused him bitter regret to be parted from his friends in such manner. He felt, however, that durance being never intended for law-abiding subjects, his incarceration was illegal, though the judge, in passing sentence, he must admit, had no other alternative from the evidence before him. He considered it, therefore, no disgrace to have effected his escape without using violence, though for a few minutes it seemed cowardly to seek safety in flight; then the knowledge of his innocence, and his unalienated right to freedom, came to him, and there was no further hesitation. He had only avoided detection at first on the station through keeping much to himself, and being almost severe to the men, and it grieved him much to keep Don, his overseer, at a distance, for the brave little fellow and himself had stood side by side in more than one tough encounter with the Myalls. Still it was now all over, and he would rejoice in being able to go about as a man amongst men again. He knew he could have trusted his old friends to have kept his secret, yet it would have been unjust to give them cause to do so on the principle that 'He who assists the guilty becomes a partner in his guilt,' and in the eyes of the law he was guilty. He would certainly acquaint Captain Ayre of his movements should he leave the district. He intended returning to Victoria very soon '*fas aut nefas*,' but in the meantime would rejoin his friends at Lake Melville and Heywood Downs, and there make arrangements for the future."

While the morning light stole in through the windows, and made dim the light of the lamp in the hall, and when no longer the wood fire threw a red glow on the hearth, a soft footstep was heard outside, and

the doctor, treading on tiptoe appeared, motioning them to follow.

They went and ranged silently round the bed ; the outlaw looking at them, twice essayed to speak aloud, but failed. All they heard was a hoarse, terrified whisper of "Hand in hand !" and the silence afterwards was unbroken by voice or motion ; for the untiring messenger of the King of kings had been to the room with a summons that there was no disobeying, and, in obedience thereunto, all that was immortal of the noted bushranger had gone before a tribunal where Mercy and Justice go hand in hand.

It was pleasant indeed for the three men—Mostyn, Dunsmere and Melville—to set out for home together, feeling, after their long sojourn under the semi-darkness of the cloud which had hovered over each, that they could face the glorious light of day, and enjoy it all the more that they were free to take their fill of it, as a just man's heritage. Melville felt like a schoolboy free for his holidays to come and go as he pleases, and whose first thought is of the pleasures that await him "at home."

When they had chatted freely over the recent stirring events, while their good horses were trotting merrily over the well-beaten road through the aisles of the forest, Melville told Dunsmere that there was one thing their Reverend comrade had omitted to tell him when speaking of Victorian life, and that was his engagement to Miss Nelly Dunsmere—Reg's sister. He might speak of it now without appearing to bring a stain upon her fair name, as he could no longer be regarded as a felon in the eyes of mankind. The one girl in the world for him, her image had been present with him in the hours of tribulation and exile, always with the same look of fealty on her sweet face as when through the mist of tears she had murmured, "Through honour and dishonour !" and he felt that

the impress then left on his mind was true to her image still.

Dunsmere grasped him tightly by the hand, saying,—

“Melville, old man, I’m right glad to hear of it! I have felt myself drawn close to you by some unseen bond of sympathy, through hearing the narration of your prosecution and detention for a crime that none of your friends harboured a thought of your having committed, and my heart warmed to you through hearing of your manliness, integrity, and prowess in sports of the field in more happy days. We have shared one or two good tussles in the saddle together: let us hope there are more such in store for us. With all my heart I rejoice to welcome you, Melville, as one entitled to even more than ordinary friendship! God send that we may go through life together with the same bond of brotherhood between us as stirs in my heart just now! Our paths, it seems, are to lie together for the present, for, to say the truth, I am most anxious to meet my old father, and bid him cease giving way to regret for what is past. I felt that he would act as he did, under the circumstances; he is such a martinet for the sake of honour.”

“You are right, Dunsmere. I could see, on my first acquaintance with him, how his heart seemed to yearn for you, in the long sigh that followed a discussion between your sisters and him on the merits and demerits of the then unproven roan, poor Dangerous, when, without a thought, your horse, Centurion, was mentioned, and I then first learnt of a son’s existence—though, by your father’s sad, pre-occupied manner, as the naming of the son’s horse brought with it a train of recollection, it was further evident to me that there was a melancholy grief connected with his history.”

“Ah, well! it is all over now, and we can meet each other without any pang of bitterness, for I

blamed my own folly all along for what had happened, not for one moment feeling angered at his righteous indignation, though I felt pained beyond measure at laying myself open to such just censure.

"I knew that in dear Nelly, whose love you have won, I had a leal and true friend, and it cut me to the quick to leave her without a good-bye. How I long to see her again! It is a wonder of wonders to hear of the family settling in Australia. Yet, reading between the lines of my father's letter, the mystery is made clear.

"Relative to the cause of my father's sorrow, apparent at the chance mention of my name, Vernon (to whose loyalty and true friendship I owe my present buoyancy of spirits), who knows all, has my consent to mention the circumstances to you which led to my leaving England.

"I, too, left a sweet girl behind me in the old land, sorrowing the more that I had to depart without a word with her. For, as you know, Melville, a man's lips are sealed at times when his excuse must be the accusation of another. And now the capricious fates are more than kind to me in their present dealings, for Miss Vernon is she whom I left, and her faith has not wavered through the vigils of time or tide.

"By the way, old fellow, she will be delighted to meet you as Fred Melville, for it was only yesterday she spoke in loving terms of my sister, with whom she had spent a few delightful weeks at The Gums."

Thus they chatted, while their silent comrade, the Rev. Jim, handled the reins of the team, enjoying their society as much as if he had joined in the conversation.

It is unnecessary to dilate upon the cordial reception accorded to the three friends when they returned together to Lake Melville and Heywood Downs. Suffice it to say that Fred Melville's old chums, the youthful pioneers of that far land, gave him joyous

greeting at the Ball which was given at Heywood Downs in honour of the visit of the ladies to the tack-blocks, and a right merry reunion it was.

Soon afterwards, Melville and Dunsmere, boon companions for a long voyage by land or sea, travelled over to Victoria together.

There was no one present when Reg Dunsmere met with his father once more, and the words that passed between them were never made known. Certain it is that from that time forth father and son were oftener together than ever they had been in their lives, and the old father seemed to have regained the spirits of his youth.

Fred was received literally with open arms by her at whose knee he had learnt instruction ; and George had a kindly light in his clear grey eyes, and a warm, close pressure of a strong right hand for the harassed brother on his return to the dear old home.

Nor were they the only ones who gave the wanderer joyous greetings ; for at The Gums he was regarded as a son, as a brother, and as some one dearer still—for the peerless light of a true woman's love shone in the eyes of the dear one who welcomed him home, with all the gladness of those who, having eagerly looked out over the angry, tempest-tossed, swirling waters of the storm-whirled sea, at length, with tears of joy and clasping of arms, give greeting to the loved ones who are safely returned.

Even the animals showed pleasure at the wanderer's return. Little Roy, his mother's faithful Skye terrier, usually most grave and serious of demeanour, almost went mad when Fred called his name, for, after leaping and fawning over his old friend and playmate, and barking as if he could scarcely find sufficient expression for his joy, he rushed through the rooms sniffing out the cats, and, in the shortest time on record, had every feline on the place perched up in the forks of the cedars in the garden, and longed

to find more to chase. It was an old game of theirs the routing of the cats, and although age had steadied the old dog down, still he had not forgotten the juvenile freaks, and wished to testify in his own way his remembrance of the games which amused his old friend and himself in moments of mischief. In the stables, too, Gladiator turned his game brown head on hearing his master's remembered voice, and his nostrils quivered with a gruff neigh of recognition, whilst old Freetrader, still sound, and fit to go anywhere over anything, now enjoying a run in one of the small paddocks, came up to him at a call, and sniffed in the coat pockets for the apple with which he was often regaled of old. There are few things more pleasant to a man than the recognition of his four-footed friends after a long absence.

Yet there was a twinge of sadness in Melville's visit to the training stables, for the old trainer's voice grew husky when he said, after hearing of the good roan's death, "He was a daisy, sir; the best ever bred in the West! I've dreamt of leading him away from the scales at Hemington, winner of the Grand National, after sweeping the board from one end of the colony to the other. And then I should have ridden my last gallop, and been content to go afoot till, when no longer my hands could do it, they wrapped the white jacket round me, and my cap was the black nodding plumes. Poor old fellow! he was bold as a lion yet gentle as a lamb, when you knew his ways! I felt a king while I knew he was alive, and would come back to the old box again; but today I'm an old cripple, and it seems as if there was was not a horse in the stable worth his corn now Dangerous is dead."

The door of the roomy loose-box, kept untenanted against the good horse's return, was hung with a band of crape. It is only in fancy that, when the buckets clink, and the horses are fed for the night, the old



trainer hears his favourite's neigh, and only a burst of air greets him as he opens the door of the box, in a moment of forgetfulness. The usual kindly greeting dies away on his lips to a heartfelt sigh, for far far away, under a spotted leopard tree, on the grey sand ridge overlooking the glistening waters of Lake Melville, is a railed-in space, where is a hewn slab with this inscription,—

DANGEROUS,

WINNER OF THE GREAT WESTERN STEEPLECHASE.

“STRAIGHT AS A LINE.”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### AT THE FINGER POSTS

AND now, for it is a few months later, the grasses wear an autumnal tint, an unseen hand, through the glorious mellow days, is tinging the vine leaves with rare blending of crimson and rich golden tints ; but no unseen fingers may paint the deep green of our heavy umbraged, bird haunted, Australian gums, changeless in sunshine or shade. And it is well so , for from the margin of the forest strong arms have been levying tribute on their willowy swaying branches to-day, that they may lend their aid to an imposing ceremony, while in the carefully tended garden plots surrounding the comfortable, roomy, station homesteads round about, dainty fingers have been busy culling the richest varieties of flowers, with a gladness that their possessors are thus enabled to testify their love for the fair chatelaine of The Gums, who is to be married to-day.

Merrily the bells are ringing a wedding peal—ay, a double wedding peal ! and from where I sit in the thronged church of Westerton, among the festoons of green leaves and the argosies of white flowers, gazing in the direction that many a score of eyes are taking, can be seen the veiled form of the beautiful Miss Dunsmere, who had vowed troth “through honour and dishonour,” and had kept her faith unswerving until this hour, and with solemnity is bowing to the

"until death us do part" of the ceremony. Beside her are her attendant bridesmaids, the Misses Mostyn, fashionably costumed, fair and stately, typical daughters of our loved Australia. Near at hand is her father, old Mr. Dunsmere, with white-haired, aged Mrs. Melville, reverently covering her face with her hand, while she offers up a silent prayer to God for His blessing on the loving and beloved pair, and the crush of friends is beside them. Stern and silent stands Fred Melville, the beau ideal of a Hussar, habited in well-fitting frock coat and garments *à la mode*, supported by his no whit less distinguished-looking elder brother George, staunch in friendship, and such an one as one would rejoice to hear say in the hour of trial,—

"Lo ! I will abide at thy right side  
And keep the bridge with thee !"

Before them, his pale, fair-bearded, clear-cut face, wearing a light of reverence for his sacred calling, is the Rev. James Mostyn, speaking in solenn tones the marriage ceremony of his Church.

On the right, next the altar railing, is another group awaiting his benediction ; and there stands an English rose in the person of Miss Vernon, and it would be a difficult matter to say which is the more beautiful bride. It would pain either to hear a comparison made, for there is no jealousy between them, they are one in friendship, heart and soul ! And with her is a girl in a thousand—Miss Maitland—and a pretty younger sister.

Her father, the stern white-haired judge, has come over the sea to give his blessing ; and there, too, with Mrs. Dalgleish and her husband, now nearly restored to health (a better man than ever he was, men say ; all his roughness has vanished, and the old domineering way has given place to a kindly manner), is the stern warrior face of the honourable old soldier, Uncle John—Colonel Dunsmere. Nigh

to the fair bride stands Reg Dunsmere, slim and straight, looking a society man down to the ground, yet the same cool steady hand who had wheeled the cattle, or taken a seat quietly on wild buck-jumping colts, as "Long Jack," in the far North.

Take a glance amongst the interested faces of the thronged church, amongst the many who are known to us ; and here and there, amid the glimmer of silk, flashes the sheen of scarlet, for this is partly a pink wedding, and the good men of the hunt would do their old comrade this last honour.

Soon the ceremony is over, and we find ourselves once more out on the green where with restless tails, merry eyes, and lolling tongues, the pack of foxhounds are clustered round the whips. Horses and carriages are everywhere, and all is bustle as preparation is made by the men in scarlet to escort their comrade to the hall close by where the wedding breakfast is laid. Ere yet mounted we have time to note lovingly, the wiry, light-conditioned, sleek, dauntless black Thunderbolt, stepping gently along beside his attendant. There, too, caparisoned for the chase for the first and last time this season, is the powerful, strong-ribbed, long-pasterned, springy-actioned, glossy-brown Gladiator, watching with keen eyes and ears thrown forward the mottled hounds, as if he longs for the beginning of the fray. Alongside him is the neat, beautifully-turned bay, little Druid, not an inch of waste about him, and yet lacking for nothing. He carries a lady's saddle and is a perfect picture as he steps daintily over the turf beside his groom. Watched closely by Jim Hall and old Ned Garry (the trainer), who are looking upon the horse as if they could see in his satin skin the reflection of that disastrous event which caused the death of their favourite roan long leagues away, is a clean-limbed, round-quartered, white-legged bay, pawing the ground impatiently, and occasionally

raising a hind hoof threateningly as he shows a white-rimmed eye, and *we* know him for the accomplished Cottesmore. He is taking his first, and probably his last, look for some time to come of the Westerton pack; for this afternoon, with his comrades Gladiator and The Druid, he leaves by train for the metropolis, thence to be shipped to England, whither Melville and Dunsmere intend voyaging with their brides.

Long in Dunsmere's memory will remain the recollection of that extraordinary leap made by his favourite bay in the far North "at the place where the roan horse died"; and he, in an occasional moment of dreamland, pictures the bay soaring skyward over some almost impossible place that has pounded the field in the Shires; and, besides he has a grand second horse in Centurion, honest and game, awaiting him there.

Fred Melville knows that he could not possibly find a horse more to his liking in the old land than Gladiator, nor would he think of trusting his dearly beloved to the caprices of a strange horse in the hunting field. On the back of the game, tractable, even-tempered little bay, The Druid, he knows, from experiences of former days in a fast run over stiff country, she can enjoy the pleasures of the best days. But often, as he scans the contour of his good brown, his thoughts steal away to the glorious gallop "by down and by dell, and by fell and by flat," under him the tireless muscles of the roan chieftain, exulting in the pride of strength and condition, striding over fence after fence without a mistake, and a sigh escapes him for what was, and what might have been!

Held wide of the crush by a natty groom, the steel of heavy iron and double bit shining like silver, is a powerful upstanding, ragged-hipped bay, white of face, his coat shining like satin, seeming in

the very pink of condition for a long strong run—large is he of hoof, whereon gleam light shoes, the hinder ones apparently carefully calked—the *beau ideal* of a weight-carrying steeplechaser, is another old favourite in the person of Mameluke (“Ould Mammy,” as Patsy calls him with tears in his eyes as he speaks of parting from the kindly tempered bay, for Patsy goes home with the horses. They are fond of him, and he would share his last crust with any one of the three). Although caparisoned for the chase apparently, he is not to go out with the hounds, for his old master has urgent need of him (cordially welcomed as he been by young and old, by rich and poor), and now he has another ceremony to perform—not a marriage ceremony—for it is a little fair-haired mother’s darling, one of those sweet flowers that seem to come up only in the spring, and with the spring disappear, on a station thirty miles away, that lies dangerously ill, and has sent a message for her old friend to come and see her now that she has heard of his return. And he will be there never fear little one! with scant loss of time, for the good horse seems to bear wings when on an errand of mercy, and his flight is like that of a bird going home.

Amongst the well-conditioned, serviceable nags stripped for the parade are many we have seen before in the field, but one, as pretty as a bronze image, his muzzle as fine as that of an Arabian, his small pricked ears and clean steel-like limbs denoting Eastern blood, is making his bow to the pack to-day, and this is “the little brown horse down the paddock.” And yonder is his owner—Guy Dudley—now the proprietor of The Wilderness Station, erstwhile jackaroo and boundary rider at the foot of the Big Range, clad in perfect hunting costume even to the tall hat which suits him so well, saluting with a hearty hand-grip the master of the hounds; for

fortune has smiled upon him in the shape of a snug legacy from home, and the Westerton hunt has gained another enthusiastic follower and a perfect horseman to boot.

All these things are seen with a flash of the eye, though the descriptive hand follows by slow degrees. Looking once more towards the church we see six good men together, and it may be for the last time, who shall say? that they thus meet,—James Mostyn, Fred Melville, Reg Dunsmere, Jack Vernon, George Melville, and Jimmy Don (who is down for the occasion, and will ride The Trader to-day). There is a general handshake warm and heartfelt, all round, then George Melville, his face grave and stern-looking, gives his arm tenderly to his white-haired mother and escorts her to the carriage. There is a general move to the Hall for the wedding breakfast; after which the huntsmen, in all the glory of hunting regalia, will escort the happy couples in their carriages to the railway station; and, as the whistle sounds, the pack will be laid on to the trail over the open country lying within sight of the line, so that the good men who, with their brides, are going away to a far country, will have a last vision of the pack in full cry.

It is needless to dwell *in extenso* on the varied and costly presents which are on view on a side table in the breakfast room. One of the most costly bears this inscription: "From J. Jeffrey, Millewa, in token of his heartfelt regret for the sorrow caused by his error, and with best wishes for the happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Fred Melville." It is usual that a story ends with a happy marriage, but that is not the only reason for the final chapter here.

It would be pleasant to follow the career of those who are about to cross the sea, and to note also how the three good horses acquit themselves on the hunting fields famous in song and story; but these

things are to be, therefore the tale is as yet untold. Would you like to mount horse and go with the pack to-day as they veer over the open like swallows, the black horse of the Master skimming along like a hawk on their flank ; and watch also how "the little brown horse" acquits himself in the throng ? You would ! So, too, would I ; but, ah me ! it has been so pleasant to stray by these running streams, cool forests filled with perfume, green grassy valleys, and breezy uplands, listening to the trample of horse hoofs, and the glad music of the hounds borne on the breeze, dreaming the old dreams ; pleasant even to trim the lamp where through the open lattice comes the sweet perfume of roses, that I have lingered long. And now know I that it is time to be up and doing, for the hand of labour beckons towards a far country where are none of these things ; and here, friend, is the spot where our paths diverge.

THE END.





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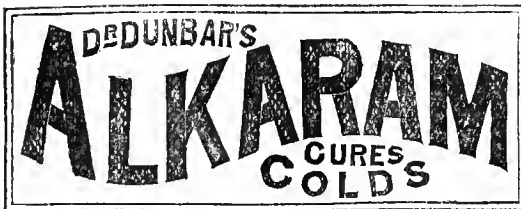
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